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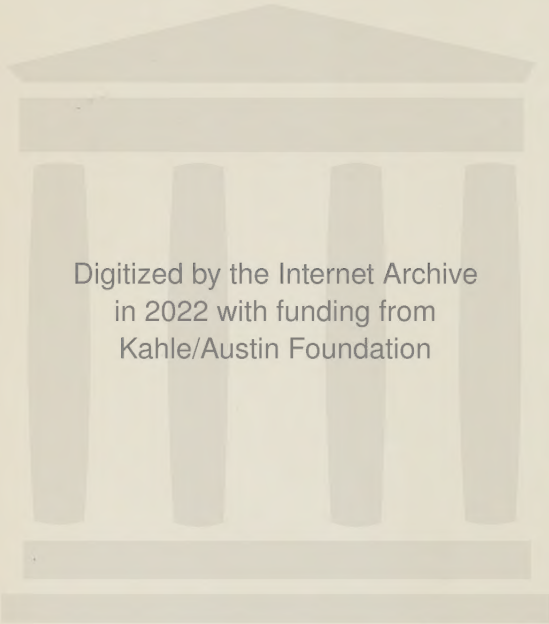
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TURNBULL









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# THE ROLLING YEARS

A NOVEL BY

AGNES SLIGH TURNBULL

*"Firm as a rock thy truth must stand  
When rolling years shall cease to move."*

ISAAC WATTS, 1719.



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*To Two Men*

MY HUSBAND

JAMES LYALL TURNBULL

*and*

MY UNCLE

REV. S. D. McCONNELL, D.D.

*This Book*

*With My Love*





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# PROLOGUE

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD

1852





## PROLOGUE

IT WAS A PLEASANT ROOM IN THE EARLY SPRING, FOR THE white lilac trees growing close to the house were tall enough to reach to the south window. From the east window just now a stripe of sunlight fell along the chain rag carpet, touching up the dull colours, and ending in a diffusion of brightness against the tall chest of drawers and the wall behind it.

The woman on the high-posted bed lay perfectly still. Only her eyes moved now towards the feathery white tips of lilacs, now to the stripe of sunlight on the floor, then back to the faded quilt that covered her. She lay supine, in that first half-stupor which follows extreme pain. The night before she had borne her twelfth child.

But never after any of the other births had there been a morning like this. An April morning drenched with perfume, warm enough for the windows to be open, but too early for the plague of flies that came with the summer. She lay, careful not to move one muscle of her tortured body, sensing deeply the sweetness of the air and the stillness of the large, bare room. She had had so few moments of quiet in her life. She wished that she need see no one all day. Not any of the children, not Daniel her husband. She wished she could lie just as she was now, very still and alone with the lilacs and the sunshine. Even these few minutes were beautiful, to be richly felt and remembered, while Eliza Jane was caring for the baby in the next room and the other children were below at their breakfast or doing the early morning chores.

There was a sudden heavy step on the back stairs. That must be Daniel. She had supposed he was still at

the barn. All in the second the sweet silence of the room was shattered. So was the peaceful languor that enveloped her. She grew tense, waiting.

The door opened creakingly, and Daniel came across the room and stood looking down at her. He was a tall spare man, stooped a little from leaning over the plough. His eyes were a keen, cold blue, but the multifarious crinkles at the corners were kindly.

"Well, Sarah?" he said.

The woman on the bed did not speak. An old bitterness suddenly burned hot in her heart. After her night of anguished labour, Daniel had come to say, "Well, Sarah?" That was all. That was always all. For twenty years without interruption she had nursed and borne children. One year to bear, one to nurse and the next to bear again. And in between were the twelve nights of blood-red agony. No other woman in the whole countryside suffered as she did in childbirth. Old Dr. Sterrett himself had told Daniel so. She had overheard him. And yet Daniel came each time to say, "Well, Sarah," as his only comment.

Mrs. Henderson knew a city woman that said there were men who didn't want their wives to suffer so—who *didn't let them*. Of course, that might or might not be true. But twelve times! Every other year since she was twenty. It was too much, when there must be nights like last night.

"Well, Sarah?" Daniel was repeating inquiringly.

"Daniel," she said shakily, still without looking at him. "I wish you'd name over all our children, beginning with Liza Jane."

"What's that?" Daniel's voice was startled.

"I'm not out of my head. I just want you to name them over."

Daniel cleared his throat. His tone was the ingratiating one used to humour invalids or children.

"Well—Liza Jane, Mary Ann, Abram——"

The woman raised a weak finger.

"There's one dead between Mary Ann and Abram. Still-born. A boy."

"Was there? Um—um. . . Abram, Hannah, Betsy——"

"Have you forgot Hepzibah and Samuel dead in between them?"

Daniel coughed a little. "They lived such a short time——"

"They had to be born like the rest," the woman said quietly. "Go on."

"Betsy, Josiah, Da——"

She raised her finger again.

"There was another—boy—dead born between Betsy and Josiah."

"That's so," Daniel agreed. Then he finished his enumeration rapidly.

"And Josiah and David and now *this* one. Liza Jane tells me it's a girl."

"Yes. And Daniel, I've named her myself. Twelve children I've had, and never one of them before this with a name I really wanted. I'm going to name this one something pretty."

Well, well. I had thought of Maria. But what's your choice? Just as long as it's a plain, sensible name."

"I'm going to call her Jeannie."

"*Jean?*" Daniel spoke the word with grave dubiety.

"No. *Jeannie.*" Her tone was stronger now, and there was a high red flush on each cheek. "I wanted to tell you I'm not going to give up. I'm set."

Daniel's brows were knit.

"It doesn't sound dignified. Plain Jean wouldn't be so bad, though I *had* thought we'd call her Maria."

"Twelve children, Daniel, and I've always given in about the names. Now I'm going to have my way. She's to be *Jeannie*. I've earned it."

"Well, well, well! If you're set."

"I'm set, Daniel."

"Well, well, let it be, then."

Daniel went out. Sarah lay again, but not so peaceful as before. The effort of conversation with Daniel had jarred her strained body. She was exhausted. With a long, shuddering breath she let herself sink again into the deep languor that was waiting to receive her. She was so unutterably weary.

If she could but lie now, untouched, unmoving, unspeaking, for one day! One day of perfect quiet. It was the greatest joy of which she could dream.

And then the door creaked again. Liza Jane was entering with the new baby in her arms, while David, aged two, squeezed past her into the room. Behind them from the back stairs, there was sound of excited scurrying and shrill voices crying:

"Father says her name's *Jeannie!*"

"*Jeannie!* Oh, goody! That's pretty. It sounds like a nickname. Honest, can we call her that?"

"Of course, if Father said so. Come on up now. Liza Jane says we can."

The woman on the bed turned her face towards her oldest daughter. She smiled wanly as she received to her care the moving bundle laid beside her. Then she reached an arm painfully over the covers and patted David's white, curly head. She could hear the other children already at the top of the stairs.

BOOK ONE

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD

1870





## CHAPTER ONE

JEANNIE'S BEDROOM WAS A TINY PLACE OVER AN END OF the kitchen. In the old days it had been known as the loft—a narrow enclosed strip under the eaves where great bunches of sage and mint and boneset swayed lightly from the rafters between smoked hams and shoulders. Baskets of butternuts and walnuts sat about the floor and occasionally a few choice apples that found the cellar climate too damp for them were spread out under the window.

But with the advent of Jeannie it had been necessary to find a place to put her when her cradle and trundle-bed days were over. The other rooms were all well filled, two beds in each, except in the big east room where Daniel and Sarah slept.

There seemed to be no place for Jeannie. But at last a compromise was effected with the hams and herbs in the small loft. They were bestowed in one end beyond a light partition which Daniel had put up on a wet day. In the other end there was set a narrow spool bed that had previously been in the attic, a small table contributed by Liza Jane, a looking-glass that David said he did not need, a small box with a card on the top showing two hands clasped about a bleeding heart—this from Betsy—and, thus equipped, Jeannie had moved in.

From the first night she had slept there, Jeannie had loved her new quarters. She had lain then, listening until she was sure that Liza Jane and Betsy were sound asleep in the room adjoining; then she got out of bed and softly closed the door between them. Now she was alone. She could lie awake as long as she wished. She could lie, all curled up in a cozy ball, warm and safe in

bed, and yet be watching the stars or running down to the sugar trees or up the hill to the orchard. For the chief delight of the new bedchamber was the fact that the bed itself was forced to stand close up against the one small square window. There had been no other arrangement possible. Sarah had been worried.

"It's not good to have a bed up against a window," she had stated.

"It'll be a draught right on her head," Liza Jane agreed.

They stopped laying the oats-straw tick on the cords to consider.

"And her subject to earache, too. Mebbe it's wrong putting her here"—from Sarah.

"Of course, in summer it won't matter," Liza Jane said.

"The night air blowing on you is bad any time," Sarah stated with conviction.

They paused, fingering the tick.

"Couldn't we hang something over the window—pin up an old quilt, mebbe?"

It was here Jeannie had cried out.

"Oh, *please* don't cover up the window, Mother. I'll keep it down as tight! But don't cover it. I want to see out."

Her mother and Liza Jane laughed at her earnestness.

"What do you expect to see when you're in bed asleep?"

Liza Jane inquired practically.

But the quilt had not been hung up.

It was ten years now since it had been discussed, and Jeannie had thrived in her tiny chamber in spite of the menace of the night air blowing over her.

But many changes had taken place in the other bedrooms during the years, changes graven deep upon Sarah's heart. In the north room on a cold December morning Josiah, a lad of ten, had cried out suddenly for his mother. When Sarah reached him he was doubled up with pain, a sharp, terrible pain in his right side.

Sarah had kept bags of hot salt to it all that day. The next morning they had sent for the doctor. He stayed through the day with them, he and Sarah working desperately. But that night little Josiah's life suddenly ended. The doctor called it acute inflammation of the bowel.

The one west room still held memories of Hannah, who had been stricken with the "black sore throat." There had been no hope from the first. The other west room held, for Sarah, a still darker shadow. It was that of Mary Ann, who had died there one hot September day pleading, pleading piteously for water, while the desperate fever scourge was sweeping the neighbourhood in the fall of '59. Sarah often wondered what would have happened if she had given her the water. But when the doctor absolutely forbade it, saying water would be fatal. . . . Ah, well, it had been fatal anyway, and Sarah's heart had never recovered from the bitterness of that struggle. The tiny graves in the churchyard were sad enough, but these three larger ones were the hardest to bear. It was God's will, Daniel said, stoically. Sometimes Sarah questioned that, then prayed for forgiveness for the thought.

But there was one more shadow that lurked and would not be laid. It was that of Abram, who had run away. There had been only a scrap of pencilled paper under the coffee-mill on the kitchen shelf one morning, to tell them all not to worry, that he was going out West to make his fortune. That was all, and no word since. Sometimes as Sarah lay awake in the night, this shadow haunted her even more than that of Mary Ann crying for water.

Yes, changes enough in the big square rooms where childish hearts had once dreamed lightly. And room enough now for Jeannie to be housed spaciouly. But when her mother had broached the matter of her taking

the north room which had been Abram's for her own, she had been almost distressed.

"Oh, Mother, I'd hate to leave my window. The north room seems so big. I'd be lost in it. I'd rather stay where I am."

And Sarah had smiled with a peculiar tenderness upon her youngest daughter, and turned the north chamber into a spare room, while Jeannie remained in the loft, guarded by Liza Jane and Betsy, who still slept together just beyond.

On this Sunday morning, a strong July sun burst through the weeping rain clouds that had hung over the countryside for weeks and struck Jeannie's small window in full flame. Jeannie opened her eyes sleepily, shook her short tight curls, and sat up in bed. She smiled. In a moment she would remember why this morning held a touch of pleasurable anticipation. Of course! She was wide awake now. It was the Sabbath day, for one thing. And old Dr. McFeeters wasn't going to preach. It was to be a young man from the Seminary. That *would* be a nice change. And it was fair weather after all the rain! Hot enough for her to wear her sprigged lawn and the wide hat!

Jeannie hugged her knees in a small ecstasy over her assembled joys. She hoped the new young preacher would jump about a little and slap the pulpit. Old Dr. McFeeters merely pointed a long bony finger and never stirred from the same spot on the pulpit rug. There were two holes in it which his feet had worn through, just standing there! And maybe the young man wouldn't make the second sermon so long as the first. Jeannie gave a small sigh here. Dr. McFeeters always preached an hour and a half both times. Even so, that was better than Dr. Porter at Polk Run. He always preached for two solid hours, so they said.

A small bird on the syringa bush trilled and fluted.



Another by the spring house answered. There were sounds from the barn, a whinny and a low moo. In the adjoining room the bedcords creaked. The day then had really begun.

Jeannie jumped to the floor. She was eighteen now, a tall, slight thing, with a live beauty which none of the other children possessed. It was as though the somewhat sombre strain of Daniel and Sarah's immediate inheritance had worn itself out in the first eleven children. In Jeannie there was bygone blood. She had, like the others, the McDowell stamp on her features: wide gray eyes, straight nose, and a faintly cleft chin, all set in a long, slender face. But Jeannie's eyes held an unquenchable eagerness, a smiling light, a constant invitation to life to laugh with her and show her its treasures.

There was a characteristic decorum about the rest of the McDowells; an unconscious dignity of speech and movement. But Jeannie's heritage had not included this. Jeannie was precipitous. Her eagerness had sent her headlong from her first baby steps.

"Jeannie will never walk if she can *fall* there faster," her mother often said, smiling.

Even in her movements now, as she stood in the early morning light putting on her muslin chemise, there was a joyous impetuosity. She tried to pull on her white cotton stockings as she stood, teetered to one side, caught the bedpost, and then sank back laughing.

*"Oh, doo da day! Oh, doo da day!  
I'll bet my money on the bob-tailed—"*

She stopped humming, her face aghast. Why, for the moment she had forgotten it was the Sabbath. Oh, how *could* she be so wicked! She pursed her mouth to abnormal lines of contrition, and started a hymn by way of absolution.

*"Twas on that dark, that doleful night  
When heaven and hell . . ."*

So sang Jeannie softly, her young brightness somehow lending grace to the sombre lines.

She was dressed now. Even her short, tight curls rebrushed around her finger. She would bounce in upon Liza Jane and Betsy and surprise them.

She pushed open the door without the formality of a knock and fell upon her older sisters. Their countenances were melancholy.

Liza Jane was thirty-eight now, thin-lipped and serious, with straight smooth black hair in contrast to the arrant curls of the rest of the family. Her eyes were keen and kindly, like her father's, but there was a faint bitter line to the lips. Liza Jane knew now that she would never be a wife. She knew and accepted the fact stoically.

Betsy was no stoic. She was plump and warm with desires. Her arms tingled for the feel of a baby's form within them. But she was hopelessly shy. She crimsoned when a man spoke to her, then covered her timidity with brusqueness, with an air of distant indifference. She had in fact built about her a wall of separation from the opposite sex, behind which she sat aquiver with her longings, still pathetically hopeful that some man would break through the wall to find her.

When Jeannie burst in upon the older girls, Betsy was sighing, and Liza Jane was mumbling with her mouth full of hair pins, "Oh, well, we'll have to have faith, that's all; but it does seem hard."

"What's hard?" Jeannie cried. "Don't you see the sun? It's a wonderful day. Just feel here by the window how hot it is already! We can wear our lawns. Oh, but I'm glad to see an end of the rain! Why—what's the matter?"

For the other two had stopped dressing to stare at her.

"Have you forgotten the *wheat*?" Liza Jane asked sharply.

"Wheat?" Jeannie echoed blankly. "Wh-what about it?"

The red rose suddenly in Liza cheeks as it always did when she was angry.

"I suppose you don't know that the wheat crop is our main living! I suppose you don't know it's been lying out there these two weeks fair rotting in the rain! I suppose you don't know it needs just one hot day of sun to get it in; and now we get a hot day—and it's the Sabbath!" Liza Jane's voice was pure sarcasm. "Oh, no, there's nothing the matter!"

Jeannie's countenance had fallen, but she was ready as usual with a hopeful suggestion.

"But to-morrow will likely be warm, too," she urged. "That would save it!"

"And suppose it's wet again to-morrow! It's just as likely, considering the kind of weather we've had all month!"

There was the thump of heavy shoes on the back stairs.

"There's Father," Betsy said.

"We'd better hurry down."

Jeannie followed, with a small shadow on her face, but a generally comfortable feeling that all would yet be well.

Their mother was already in the kitchen, and the coffee was boiling. It had been ground the day before, just as the meat for a cold supper had been cooked and set away; just as the shoes had all been shined and the men's faces shaved on Saturday evening, so that no hand might be lifted in unnecessary work on the Sabbath.

They all now went to their appointed tasks: Father to salt the sheep, David to do the feeding, Liza Jane and Betsy to the milking, and Jeannie to help her mother in the house. When the others were gone, Jeannie went close to Sarah.

"Mother, are you worried about the wheat?"

And then Jeannie was truly alarmed, for she saw a tear drop on Sarah's hand.

"It's the biggest part of our living, you know. If we lose it, it'll make a bad winter. The weather's been so strange, we can't count a day ahead. That's why it's hard to see to-day so bright when we can't do anything."

"But, Mother——"

Then Jeannie stopped, ashamed of the thought in her mind, and went on laying the plates on the table.

They all gathered in rather silently for breakfast. Daniel looked an old man that morning. He was barely sixty, but he had aged early. His curly hair was gray, and his thin face sagged in melancholy lines. There was still a latent twinkle in his eye, but the long years of struggle with the stony hills had left their mark upon him.

Sarah was better preserved. She had lost her youthful freshness very soon. The pains and care of her family had made her a middle-aged woman when she was still in her twenties. But having done that, the years seemed to have accomplished their worst upon her. She might now have been forty-eight instead of ten years older. There was a firm plumpness of flesh, a smoothness of brow, and a fresh brown to her hair in spite of its gray threads that gave her something very near to beauty, the beauty of an autumn apple tree.

Daniel's grace was longer than usual that morning. He prayed that their faith might be strong; that they might never question the dealings of the Almighty, and that, if it should be the will of the Lord, there might be continued fair weather.

David's young face looked tense as his father ended. He had laboured to raise that wheat which stood now, waiting precariously upon the fate of another day. David was nearly twenty now, almost a man. Tall and

spare like his race, ruddy from the wholesome work of the farm, but with a pair of dark brooding eyes that defied penetration. David kept his own counsel. Only to Jeannie did he sometimes confide his secret thoughts. There was between the two a strangely intimate bond. Jeannie had whispered to David many things she would not have told Liza Jane and Betsy. Sometimes across the table they laughed at each other, when no one else saw any humour.

But this morning David would not even smile.

There was a subdued hurry after breakfast. It was a long drive to church, and Daniel's punctuality was proverbial. Indeed, as Sarah herself said with her quiet wit, he considered himself late if there was any person there ahead of him. Moreover, time had to be left for family prayers. And since the chapter due that morning was one of the longest in the Old Testament, and since nothing short of an earthquake would make Daniel abbreviate it by a single verse, there was need of haste.

At nine o'clock, Daniel, always the first to be dressed, was seated on the high front seat of the spring wagon, one freshly-shined cowhide boot resting on the step outside, one hand gripping the whip handle which he tapped smartly against the dashboard.

"David! Hurry up! Come, Sarah! Come, girls! It's getting late."

Jeannie was always the next one ready. Details of dress did not disturb her. In spite of Sarah's methodical example, Jeannie was incorrigibly careless. Buttons were replaced by pins at the last moment, a deft fold covered a forgotten rent, a shoe was shined upon the upper reaches of a stocking, a spot was concealed by a brooch, a loose hat flower secured by a wire hairpin, and presto! Jeannie stood arrayed.

This morning as she peered into her small mirror she tried not to know that she was almost incredibly pretty.



The row of tight little brown curls bobbed about under the light straw hat; the eyes sparkled and shone with their eager light, the full lips curved sweetly above the dimpled chin.

But there was, to Jeannie's mind, one serious defect. Her dress, instead of billowing outward in a firm and beautiful contour midway between neck and waist, hung flat and straight upon her young chest. Jeannie considered. And then with the thought was born the act. In a twinkling she had stripped the coarse muslin slip from her pillow, rolled it up, slipped it inside the front of her waist and secured it to her chemise. The effect was perfect! She turned sideways to see the elegant bulge more clearly in the mirror. That was something like! With a last swish of ruffles, she gathered up her long mitts and hurried through the girls' room. She had her reasons for not wishing to linger for too close inspection. Liza Jane and Betsy were preoccupied, however. Dressing for them was a serious business to the last meticulous button.

"Wave, Jeannie, when Father gets really set to start," Betsy called after her.

David was just coming out of his room. He looked smaller somehow in his Sabbath suit than he did in his loose-fitting work clothes. But he was a handsome lad at any time with a good pair of shoulders and an upstanding carriage. He looked at Jeannie curiously now, and then a faint grin touched his lips. Jeannie accepted it as tribute.

"Ain't I nice, David?" she whispered.

"Terrible nice," he answered. And then with a quick move of his arm saved her from falling down the stairs.

"Why don't you watch where you're going?" he said severely. "You'll get killed yet. Don't you ever look at your feet?"

Jeannie giggled. "Just when I tie my shoes," she said. "Hurry, David. There's Father calling again."

Sarah was already in the wagon, seated on one of the two carriage seats that had been fastened in the back part to accommodate the feminine portion of the family. At her feet was the basket containing the lunch which would be eaten at intermission, between the two sermons. David climbed up beside his father, and Jeannie settled herself by Sarah's side.

Daniel looked at his watch.

"Where are Liza Jane and Betsy? If they aren't here in two minutes, we'll start anyway."

Jeannie knew then that the last moment of toleration had been reached. She stood up and waved frantically. A head appeared at the upper window. In another minute Liza Jane and Betsy emerged from the front door and came sedately down the walk.

"All ready, Daniel," Sarah said.

There was a sudden rattling lurch as the team started. The first light baptism of dust settled upon them as they clattered down the lane crossing the little bridge over the Whitehorn. An hour's sunshine seemed to be sufficient to raise the top surface of the damp soil, and the sun was hot already. Nobody spoke as they passed between the wide wheat fields where the grain lay already sprouting in the shock. Daniel's lips were set tight as he glanced right and left. And there was a dubious moisture in Sarah's eyes.

For a month the weather had been capricious beyond precedent. For a day or two at a time, the sun shone with convincing heat. Neighbour assured neighbour that the skies had finally cleared. The men laboured furiously in the fields, only to be stopped by a new deluge of rain. For a week every farmer in the countryside had been waiting, nerves on edge, for a few hours of bright sunshine, for the one day's respite from the wet that seemed due. And it had come on the Sabbath.

The wagon rattled on. There was the warm mingled smell of the steaming fields, the quick sweating horses,

the leather of the carriage seats. They rode past the McKinstrie's shabby cottage with its entourage of unkempt outbuildings. Old McKinstrie was just harnessing the horse to the decrepit buckboard. He called lustily, "Hi, Mr. McDowell!"

Daniel made a small dignified gesture with his whip, and said nothing. Old McKinstrie was the community reprobate. He was lazy. He told lies. He got drunk. There was even a widespread suspicion that when he had to be called in to help with the butchering, certain choice portions of the pig departed with him. But his long, lean, tobacco-stained figure, followed by two or three long, lean hound dogs, was a familiar and accepted part of the countryside. His two girls Liz and Mag kept house for him in their slack fashion and "hired out" among the neighbours when there was need.

But the wagon rattled on. Liza Jane and Betsy smoothed their dresses at intervals and settled their hats more primly as the jolts dislodged them. Sarah's grey eyes still mournfully swept the fields. They had come two miles now, and there were two more to go. They all knew it by the great mulberry tree that stood in the corner of the Forsythe farm. The road dipped into a hollow shaded by branching maples, and then emerged suddenly to command a wide view of the Forsythe land.

It was Jeannie's quick eyes that first saw the amazing spectacle.

"Mother!" she cried. "Father, *look!*"

On the crest of the rolling right-hand field were Big Bob Forsythe and his hired man, with the team and the hay wagon. He himself was tossing the grain about with swift movements of his powerful arms. He was taking in his wheat!

Daniel pulled the horse to a stop that all but threw them on their haunches. There was a dead aghast silence in the



spring wagon; then Daniel handed the lines to David and got down.

"What are you going to do?" Sarah asked tremulously.

"It's my duty to speak to him," Daniel replied grimly.

But he did not need to cross the field. Big Bob had seen them stop. With his usual hearty friendliness he waved and came towards them. Daniel waited. Big Bob reached the fence, put one foot on the lower rail, pushed back his hat, and spat genially.

"How're you, Dan'l? 'Morning, Mrs. McDowell! G'd-morning! Fine day!"

"Robert!" Daniel's voice sounded like the pronouncement of doom. "Robert, I couldn't believe the testimony of my eyes as I saw what you are doing! Would you endanger your soul for all eternity just for a few bushels of wheat?"

Big Bob smiled. "Oh, I calc'late I'll have a pretty fair crop," he said. "Close to five hundred bushels." Then he went on. "You see, Dan'l, you and I don't look at things the same. I'd ruther take a chance on endangerin' my soul a little, than to have my family needin' things all winter that this wheat could buy them."

"Robert, the Lord will provide for those that obey him. It's my duty as your friend and as an Elder in the Church to implore you to stop this wickedness."

Big Bob shook his head.

"Sorry, Dan'l, to see you so worked up. You al'ays did take your religion pretty hard. I guess that's right, too. Always admire it in other folks, but I can't seem to do it myself. Now my idee about this wheat is that the Lord expects us to use our common sense. Seems to me on this partic'lar day it's our business to save our crop, and to listen to sermons some other time. Well, I mustn't keep you late for church."

"Robert"—Daniel's voice was stern—"do you realise that I will have to report this to the Session?"

"Al'ays do your duty, Dan'l," Big Bob said calmly, though there was an ironical tightening of his lips.

"And you actually mean to go on with this wickedness?"

"Correct as hell, and two to carry," Big Bob said with finality. He waved to the occupants of the spring wagon and turned back to his work.

Daniel's face was set as he climbed again to his seat.

"To add profanity to all the rest!" he said heavily.

The terrible silence still held them all fast as the wagon rattled on.

Nothing like this had ever happened in the history of this neighbourhood. Even a red-handed murder would have seemed only little more awful in its degree of sin than this thing which Big Bob was doing with calm defiance. To take in the harvest on a Sabbath, when not even a coffee-mill was turned on that day! The women's faces had gone a little white. Daniel's was drawn. Robert Forsythe was one of his oldest friends. No similarity of taste or temperament bound them, but the stronger tie of a kindly, lifelong familiarity. And now he must be the instrument to bring him to public disgrace, for to keep silent was out of the question.

The thoughts of the others seemed to rise and settle over the wagon in an aura of confused distress.

"He's right," David was telling himself. "I don't care. He's right. If God is a reasonable being, He would want us to save our crops! Why *couldn't* we have church on a wet week day just for once!"

Betsy's tender heart was fluttering at the horrible future of Big Bob, spending an eternity in the hell which he had named so lightly. Big Bob was so funny and so kind. He didn't seem like the kind of person to be doomed to everlasting fire.

Sarah's thoughts were strange. "That day I came up the Forsythe lane and they didn't see me, Big Bob had just

lifted Mrs. Forsythe off her horse. And he held her for a minute against his breast and put his cheek against hers. And she laughed so happy. . . . I'd have been willing to take a chance on all the punishment of an after life if Daniel had been tender with me, even once! . . . God forgive me! What am I thinking? Will I always have a wicked heart?"

Liza Jane's practical mind had for the moment left Big Bob and his transgression. Her eyes had fixed themselves keenly upon Jeannie. Suddenly she cried out.

"Mother, what's Jeannie got in her dress? Lookit!"

It was vain for the culprit to fold her arms. The pillow slip was discovered and removed. Jeannie folded it tenderly and sat down on it, then stared pensively at the landscape.

"It looked fine," she murmured, "if you'd only left me alone. Just like a real bust."

David had understood what was going on without turning his head to look. He reached in his pocket now and produced an apple that he had meant to eat himself during the last mile. Instead he slipped it over Jeannie's shoulder. She gave his hand a brief squeeze and then munched audibly, a faint comfort creeping over her in spite of the loss of her contour.

They were nearing the church now. It stood upon a little knoll, a plain red brick building with no thought of beauty in its design. It faced the world with a hard clean severity of outline in keeping with the Calvinistic doctrines which echoed within its walls. It was fifty years now since it had been built by the first Scots-Irish pioneers who had crossed the Alleghenies with their goods and their families on pack horses, to settle on the rolling western Pennsylvania hills some thirty miles east of Pitts Landing.

But if the builder of the church had wrought into it no beauty within or without, Nature during the years had

added her own. A vine covered one side, scarlet in the autumn, tenderest green in the spring. The grass about the worn flagstone steps was thick and soft. Great oak-trees surrounded the knoll, and far and wide the rich blue reaches of the sky shone down on fruitful fields and orchards.

Daniel directed his team through the tiny village of Confluence, which lay at the foot of the knoll—only a handful of houses, a store, and a blacksmith shop—and then drove up to his regular place in the long row of sheds that flanked the church property. There were already several teams there before him this morning.

Sarah and the girls got out, settled their hats, smoothed their dresses, and then made their way slowly towards the church door, where other women and girls were standing. There was a discreet soberness in their looks and tones suitable to the day.

“Good-morning, Mrs. Henderson.”

“Good-morning, Mrs. McDowell.”

Any bright sprightliness of manner would have been regarded as unseemly, in spite of the fact that this was the one day of the week in which social contacts were assured; the one day in which new dresses were certain to have a wearing; the one day which many a lonely soul on a remote farm anticipated with a desperate eagerness.

The men, looking stiff and strained in their Sabbath suits, stood awkwardly about the churchyard in the shade of the trees. They, too, were solemn. A loud laugh would have seemed as sacrilegious as a bomb.

“How are ye, Daniel? Family well?”

“Good-morning, Simpson. Fine day.”

They stood looking off over the countryside, rarely meeting each other’s eyes.

“Weather seems to be settled at last.”

“Yes, I think it’s taken the turn now.”

“Guess we’re to have a young man from the Seminary to-day. Name’s Richards, I think.”

“Bad business if it would rain to-morrow.”

More spring wagons and buggies came up the knoll.

The women began to drift inside and take their places in the hard, straight pews. The men followed more slowly. The last to come inside were the mothers with tiny babies.

The young minister himself walked slowly up the aisle at ten minutes to eleven. He had come with the Hendersons and Jane and Matilda, the Henderson daughters, came into church with a blushing air of importance which they could not conceal.

Indeed the young man was handsome enough to send colour to a girl's cheeks. When he entered the pulpit and came forward to open the Bible at the desired Scripture reading, a little smothered murmur ran over the congregation. He was more than six feet tall and strongly built. His eyes and hair were dark, and his cheek carried as much colour as those of the farm lads. But his countenance had a serious intentness, a spiritual luminosity that gave him the look of a young Isaiah.

When he sat down on the long horsehair sofa behind the pulpit and covered his eyes with his hand, there was a greater hush than usual in the congregation. It seemed as though his prayer could be felt.

The service proceeded in its time-honoured fashion. The voices rose in a strange melody of discords, old and young, tuneful and strident, but somehow blent by the dignity of the music and the emotional fervour of the congregation, into a great diapason of worship.

*“O God! our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast,  
And our eternal home.”*

There was no haste. The singers tasted the full flavour of the great words as they sang. There was a long

thoughtful pause between the verses. This was the day towards which the whole week moved. Each moment must be savoured to the full.

*"Before the hills in order stood,  
Or earth received her frame,  
From everlasting Thou art God,  
To endless years the same."*

Daniel McDowell's head was raised, scorning the book. It was one of his favourite hymns. His voice, an uncertain tenor, rang out clear and strong, sometimes on and sometimes off the key. Sarah had a rich, true contralto, one of the few in the congregation. Jeannie, who was by way of inheriting it, leaned close to her, blending her voice with that of her mother, concentrating hard in order to shut out the sound of Daniel's uneven tonic excursions on one side, and Betsy's on the other. Liza Jane had a high, hard soprano, accurate and expressionless. David possessed the real voice of the family, a deep bass which in a familiar tune like this he let out unafraid.

*"A thousand ages in Thy sight  
Are like an evening gone . . ."*

So they sang, each conscious of the young minister, thumbing his notes behind the pulpit.

At the conclusion of the long prayer the elder folk of the congregation knew that a man of God was among them. They were sermon-tasters, all of them, keen doctrinal critics who could scent the odour of heresy a mile away; but they were, above all, men and women of prayer.

It was not without significance that the church roster read like a gathering of Scottish clans: McConnell, McDowell, McKelvey, McClelland, McChesney, McKain, McClester, McIlvaine, McCartney, to say nothing of the



Buchanans, the Shieldses, the Fosters, and the Steeles. The strain of the Celtic mystic ran in their veins and they knew by instinct when a man was speaking to God, and when he was reciting words to impress a congregation. This young man spoke directly and eloquently to the Almighty, and when he had finished, the men and women settled themselves in their seats with an eager intentness to hear what the next hour would bring.

The July sun fell in warm waves through the high, square, opened windows. An occasional blue fly made a frightened buzzing venture over the heads of the people. There was the sound of stamping and muted whinnying from the long row of sheds. Outside, summer, fair and bountiful, lay spread for man's taking under a sapphire sky.

Inside, the young prophet of the Lord built up mercilessly, step by step, the doctrine of the Atonement. His face was set, his dark eyes gave no quarter as he described man's lost estate, his despairing condition, his colossal guilt. Even the rending climax of Calvary did not bring unqualified hope. Only the "elect" few, the chosen of God from all eternity, would participate in the great salvation. For all the rest of mankind there was left only the thunder of doom, the blackness of the darkness of eternal perdition.

It was over. The young minister, spent and perspiring, leaned for support upon the great Bible atop the pulpit as he pronounced the benediction. The men and women who had sat tense and torn with their own spiritual fears during the sermon, were again conscious of the warm clover-scented summer air, and the benignant sunshine. The comfortable familiarity of the present world stole pleasantly over their senses. The men stretched their cramped legs, the women felt of their bonnets, as they all made their way with slow decorum out of their seats and down the aisle.

Sarah caught Daniel's arm. Her eyes were piteous.

"Will you—are you going to speak to the Session—about Mr. Forsythe?"

Daniel's thin lips were set.

"It's my duty," he whispered back.

And Sarah knew that from that there was no appeal. She glanced at the girls, and saw from their faces that the strange young minister had banished Big Bob's wickedness temporarily from their minds.

"It's just as well," she thought.

The families scattered about the churchyard to eat their lunch. For this was merely the "intermission" between the two sermons of the day. David had already brought the McDowell basket from the wagon, and Sarah and the girls sat down with careful regard to their dresses on a clean grassy slope under an oak-tree. There was little conversation as they ate the thick slices of bread and meat, and the fat sour-milk cookies. By the time the apples were reached, Jeannie as usual could no longer withhold her thoughts from utterance.

"Isn't he handsome, Mother? And can't he preach? I wish we could always have him instead of Dr. McFeeters."

"Jeannie!" admonished her father gravely.

"Well, I mean he talks so loud and then so soft, and he makes gestures and goes from one side of the pulpit to the other and Dr. McFeeters never moves. Don't *you* wish he was our regular preacher, Betsy?"

Betsy's full lips twitched self-consciously. Already in her eager, unbridled fancy, she was married to the handsome stranger, secure and satisfied in her wifehood. It was Liza Jane who spoke.

"What's his name?" she asked calmly as she reached for a cake.

"James Richards," David answered. "I heard Mr. Henderson say so. He's ready for his last year in the



Seminary, but he has to stay out and teach this winter to earn some money."

Daniel looked up quickly.

"Well, well! I wish we could get him for Painter Hollow. He would be a fine example for the young people. I think I'll speak to him."

"Oh, Father!" Jeannie breathed ecstatically.

Betsy turned towards Liza Jane. There was a quick fear in her eyes.

"It'd be the Hendersons that would get him to board. They're nearer the schoolhouse," she whispered.

"Better wait till you see whether he comes at all or not," Liza Jane answered in a low tone.

Daniel had risen and was scanning the churchyard. His brows were knit. It was the hour now for the meeting of the Session in the basement room of the church. He walked away without a word and joined the other Elders at the door.

The girls put the odds and ends of lunch back in the basket and handed it to David, who would soon stroll out to the wagon, meet some of the other boys, and finally walk to the spring down in the hollow or perhaps pick some early plums from the tree that stood on the edge of the manse property. The young fellows would talk a little of the weather and the crops, then refer to the young minister, and finally get to the real subject of interest, the girls. There would be a lewd story or two which some of the coarser lads had picked up at the blacksmith shop, and which the purer-minded ones enjoyed with a shamed, curious relish. It was their nearest approach to the raw material of life.

Liza Jane and Betsy with an effort at casual friendliness made straight for the group of which the Henderson girls were the centre. There would be news of the young preacher there.

Sarah, as was her wont, turned into the graveyard that

joined the church lawn, to stand musingly beside the small graves in the McDowell plot.

Jeannie, left to her own devices, walked around to the back of the church, where on long benches in the shadow of the wall the old women sat and gossiped and the young mothers nursed their babies. It was this latter ceremonial that drew Jeannie. She slipped down now at the end of the bench beside the smallest baby and touched a tiny hand gently.

"Can I hold it when it's through feeding, Mrs. McKelvey?" she asked softly.

"That you can, Jeannie. My arm's near broke. You do like the wee ones, don't you?"

"I think they're terrible nice," Jeannie replied, her eyes shining.

Old Granny McCleester on the middle of the bench, who had not noticed Jeannie's arrival, went on with her story, the rich burr in her voice as pronounced as when she had left Scotland forty years before.

"Aye, it was young Joe Falkner and Mattie from over Poke Run way. I always said they'd make a spoon or spoil a horn, that pair! And sure enough, after they was married didn't the bairn come ahead of time. Mattie said it was a seven-months baby, and she held her head as high as ever; but nobody believed her.

"Well, when the preacher got wind of it, he sent three of the Elders to wait on them and find out what was what. An' one of them that went was old Squire Marshall."

Granny stopped and chuckled. Then she folded her hands more comfortably over her capacious abdomen, extended one large carpet-slipped foot before her, and moistened her lips with relish. Next to her Miss Prissy Hidden, the community tailoress, a vinegar-tongued spinster, leaned nearer in order not to miss a word, and now asked sharply, "And what did they find?"

"Aye," said Granny, "I'm comin' to that. They went to

see Joe and Mattie. The next Sabbath the preacher called a Session meetin' an' asked if they was ready to report. 'Aye,' says the Squire. 'Did you see the bairn?' asks the preacher. 'Aye,' says the Squire. 'Is it your honest *opeenion* it's a seven-month bairn?' says he. 'No,' says the Squire. 'Just as I thought,' says the preacher. 'No,' says the Squire again, 'it looked to me more like a *six*-month one. In fact,' says he, 'it was so little, I'd a mind to put it in me snuffbox an' fetch it back to you!'"

Granny's chuckles grew to a laugh and a wave of giggles spread along the bench. Only Miss Prissy, disappointed in the *dénouement*, looked severe.

"It's no laughing matter!" she snapped. "The young folks nowadays have no sense of decency. Things are in a pretty pass when three couples have to stand up before our own pulpit here inside a year and answer to the charge of *prenuptial fornication*!"

She rolled the latter words with zestful emphasis upon her virginal tongue and then gave a quick glance to either side, evidently struck by the fear that some of the culprits might be within hearing. Reassured, however, that all the infants present had been conceived in honourable wedlock, she went on.

"Year before last there was just one case. Last year there were two cases. And this year there've been *three*. Now what do you make of *that*? What signifies makin' a couple stand up before the congregation to confess their sin when everybody knows it anyway! I say the church should *do* something!"

An ominous light gathered in Granny McCleester's eyes.

"Aye," she said shortly. "Let the church *do* something! Let it put out the moon an' stop the roses from bloomin' and then mebbe it can stop the blood of the young ones from runnin' hot betimes. Let me tell you, Prissy Hidden, it's a fell work for a woman to bring a bairn into the world. An' *I* say if she gets it safe borned an' has a ring

on her finger by the time she's done it, the preacher an' the Elders would do well to mind their own business an' ask no questions."

Miss Prissy's thin hands flew to her face in a gesture of horrified withdrawal. A faint murmur, half shock, half approval swept along the bench.

In a moment Miss Prissy returned to the attack.

"An' suppose the church gets as lax as you want it to, what'll be the end of it? I tell you, in another generation or so, there'll *be no religion at all!*"

A small rippling laugh from the end of the bench made every one start. It was Jeannie, too intent upon her small charge to have heard any of the weighty conversation that had been going on about her.

"Look, Mrs. McKelvey," she cried triumphantly, "when you tickle him here he shows his dimples!"

"Bless the young un!" Granny McCleester muttered. "I didn't know she was in earshot!"

Jeannie, embarrassed to find all eyes suddenly upon her, rose to her feet, whispering to Mrs. McKelvey, "Can I take him out time of the sermon if he cries?"

"Of course, child. And thank you for it. Now run along."

Jeannie walked back to the front churchyard nursing a small grievance. Why should every one call her "child" and "young one" when she was grown up, as tall now as Liza Jane or Betsy? It was entirely too bad. The false bust might have helped some if she'd been allowed to keep it. She stopped suddenly. David was coming hurriedly up the path from the spring alone. His face was an angry red. Jeannie hurried to him.

"What's wrong, Davy?" she asked.

"Nothing," he said, tossing his head. "Where were you?"

"Back of the church. There *is* something wrong, Davy. Why do you look like that?"

"Like what?" he repeated roughly. And then, as he saw the hurt in Jeannie's eyes, he caught her hand awkwardly. No one was in sight.

"I didn't mean to say it so cross. It's just Mag McKinstrie that bothers me. She follows me round. I don't like her."

"Don't you?" Jeannie echoed wonderingly. "I think she's funny. Her eyes are just like a pig's. I'm always thinking she'll grunt." Then, as an afterthought, "What does she follow *you* round for, Davy?"

"Oh, I don't know," David replied gruffly. "Say, they're beginning to go in. It must be church time again."

As they neared the doorway they were conscious of a subtle excitement. The men and women were drawing near in groups. There were shocked faces and anxious ones. There were the bright beady-eyed looks of those who love the unusual, especially if it implies a sin in a fellow being.

David caught Jeannie's arm. "I know what's up," he whispered. "They've heard about Big Bob taking in his wheat!"

Jeannie stopped short. Her face paled. "Oh, Davy, I'd forgot about it. Oh, you *don't* think they'll put him out of the church for it, do you?"

"Hard to tell," David answered, and swallowed audibly.

The afternoon service was the one which tested the endurance of the congregation, especially the eldest and the youngest. The opening hymn rang out with free solemn assurance.

*"There is a land of pure delight  
Where Saints immortal reign;  
Infinite day excludes the night  
And pleasures banish pain.*

*"Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood  
Stand dressed in living green. . . ."*

Well enough for the hymn, and even for the first prayer and the Scripture reading! Every one was wide awake too for the announcements, read in the young minister's strong slow voice.

"There will be a prayer-meeting this evening at the home of Mrs. Elizabeth Kelly at early candle-lighting."

"There will be a specially called meeting of the Session at the home of Mr. Daniel McDowell on next Friday evening."

Sarah winced. That would be the trial of Big Bob. If they had only had it elsewhere! How could Daniel bear to have it in *his* house, and Mr. Forsythe his old friend and nearest neighbour. Daniel was hard sometimes.

The young minister had begun upon his sermon, "Salvation by the Blood, the Only Means of Escape." His face looked tired, but his eyes were alight with earnestness at the burden of his message. The heavy post-noon sunshine settled in windrows of heat above the heads of the listeners. Granny McCleester slept audibly in the upper corner of her pew. Old McKinstrie's lean face lolled against his supporting arm, the skinny, tobacco-stained fingers making a queer pattern against his tousled hair.

The good mothers in Israel nodded, caught themselves up sharply, nodded, and tried to look alert again. The men, used to hard daily work in the open air, shifted uneasily. When the temptation to sleep grew too deadly, Daniel always rose and paced slowly up and down the aisle, his hands behind his back, his brows knit thoughtfully as he followed the sermon. Other men here and there followed his example.

"The blood! The blood!" thundered the young minister. "Redemption by the blood! How shall we escape if we neglect *so* great salvation?"

Suddenly there came the sound for which Jeannie was waiting. It was a shrill, uncompromising cry. It



persisted. It came from the McKelvey baby. Jeannie looked meaningly into her mother's face for a sign, then slipped into the aisle, and in a moment had the wailing infant in her arms. As she made her exit through the vestibule at the back, and on down the stairs, a delicious sense of freedom enveloped her. For a whole hour, perhaps more, she would have a baby to play with! She could sit on the bench behind the church and talk to it, and no one would see or know!

She sat down cautiously, adjusting the baby on her left arm. She tossed off her hat and let it lie where it fell on the ground beside her. Like a dim, far-off note of doom the voice of the young preacher came borne on the drowsy air.

"Salvation by the blood!"

Jeannie gently removed the baby's booties. Her red lips were curved with happiness. She caressed the small toes.

"*This* little pig went to market, and *this* little pig stayed at home. . . ."

Bees from the row of hives along the manse fence droned by. The horses in the sheds neighed and stamped. An early locust trolled in the big maple-tree that shaded the bench. Jeannie cuddled the baby in her arms till he fell asleep. Even then she did not mind his weight. She leaned against the cool brick wall, her eyes dreamy and content. It would be fun to have a nice handsome young man for a teacher. She hoped Father would get this Mr. Richards for Painter Hollow! Perhaps he would even board with them. At least he would certainly come often to the house, and Liza Jane and Betsy would be setting their caps for him; and she would have something really to tease them about. It *would* be fun!

With the happiness of mind which was her chief characteristic, Jeannie had once more shed all anxious thoughts relating to Big Bob and the fate of the wheat;

and even the new anxiety of David's angry face when he told of Mag McKinstrie. And the hour passed.

When the sound of the closing hymn stirred the air, Jeannie jumped guiltily, jammed her hat on at an indefinite angle, and raised the baby to her shoulder. By a hasty ascent of the stairs she was able to return the quiet infant to his mother and be in her own pew in time for the benediction.

Something like a sigh swept the congregation as they made ready to leave. It was a blending of a physical relief from the straight hard seats, a spiritual fear for the fate of their souls, and a human touch of disappointment that the great event of the week was over and that now each one must return to the toil and isolation of his own farm. It was audible, this sigh, though no one seemed to breathe it.

There was a sudden clinging together on the part of the women as they reached the outside. Something of the workaday world crept into their speech while they kept their voices low.

"Yes, I got eight pounds of butter from the churning, and her a young cow! But oh, have you heard about Big Bob Forsythe?"

". . . Mary Kelly's expecting again, by fall, they say, an' him such a poor briggie to work. Well, she drove her pigs to a poor market, yon girl!"

". . . No, there's nothing to it! Matilda just takes a buggy ride with him once in a while. He's only a lad. But as I tell her, 'The yappin' of the wee dogs ay brings the big ones!'"

". . . And if you'll put some dried hops in a jar and steam them, there's nothing like the smell of them to break up a summer cold. Listen. Don't talk loud. Did you hear about Mr. Forsythe?"

". . . I've a new pattern for a sunbonnet I'll send over to you the next time Job has an errand that way. It's—



*What did you say? His wheat! To-day! Oh, you must be mistaken!"*

"Oh, Mrs. McDowell, *is it true?*"

Sarah climbed stiffly into the spring wagon. The others for once were all there ahead of her. They rattled down the little hill, through Confluence, and on to their turn of the road. The horses trotted swiftly, eager for their own mangers. Before any one realised it they were passing the Forsythe farm. The wheat field was clean of its sheaves. They could see the last load heaped high at the barn.

It was after four when they reached home, just time, as Daniel announced, for one round of the catechism before he and David must start the barn work. But every one must hurry. Sarah and the girls went off to change their dresses, and Jeannie, being first downstairs again, collected the small copies of the New England Primer from which they had all learned their catechism. Jeannie rather liked these amazing little volumes with the thrilling frontispiece of John Rogers being burned at the stake while his wife, accompanied by "nine small children and one at the breast," looked calmly on.

Inside were the large fat letters from which children learned their alphabet, rows of easy words to spell, then the "*Short and Easy Questions for Children*," dealing with such light and infantile themes as "What was the condition of the covenant of works?" "Which person of the Godhead is Christ?" and "What sort of a place is hell?"

Following this, however, were the pages upon which Jeannie never ceased to delight herself. They represented the Alphabet again, but this time elegantly versified and illustrated; for instance:

A      *In Adam's Fall*  
         *We sinnèd all,*

showing Adam and Eve without benefit of costume, stretching their hands (Eve's containing the apple) towards a serpent which twined gracefully around a tree trunk;

*U*      *Uriah's beauteous wife*  
          *Made David seek his life,*

with the drawing of the lady, one hand at her heart, and one foot apparently testing the temperature of her bath, while David, at an extraordinarily close vantage point, viewed the scene.

Jeannie always shuddered a bit when she came to Y:

*Y*      *Youth forward slips,*  
          *Death soonest nips.*

For this showed a skeleton with an arrow, about to strike down a small, terrified boy on the run.

The tale ended comfortably, however, with

*Z*      *Zaccheus he*  
          *Did climb a tree*  
          *His Lord to see.*

Jeannie, who still loved to climb a tree occasionally, approved highly of this arrangement.

"Will we sit on the back porch, Mother?" she called now, the books in hand.

"I think we'd better. The air seems close. Very close." Sarah scanned the heavens with anxious eyes.

The warm July day had indeed culminated in an hour of unbearably oppressive heat. A slow torpor seemed to gather and grow until it lay like a weight upon all life. Daniel's mouth looked drawn as he took his seat. From the back porch they could all see the wheat lying dry

and golden and ready below the inscrutable face of the sky.

Daniel cleared his throat and nodded to Jeannie, who sat next to him.

"What is the chief end of man?"

There was something soothing to Daniel in these carefully worded elementals of the Calvinistic faith. He could ask and answer the whole hundred and seven of them without a book. They were interwoven with the very texture of his thinking. Having accepted beyond question the premises upon which their conclusions were based, he felt a satisfaction in their hard logic, their chaste severity of expression, their absolute finality of statement.

The catechism went on. Liza Jane and Betsy prided themselves on perfection. Sarah herself had been letter-perfect from her childhood. David, his dark brows drawn, answered grudgingly but without mistake. It remained as usual for Jeannie to become entangled in the *acts* and *works* of grace. Even her device of naming the three lilac bushes in the back yard for these three most ticklish questions did not avail.

"What is sanctification?" her father demanded of her suddenly.

"Sanctification is an act of God's free grace——"

She was stopped at once.

"A *work*, Jeannie, a *work*! Will you never get these straightened out? Now try again."

Jeannie twisted her curls nervously.

"It would have been so much easier, when they made justification and adoption acts, to have just let sanctification be one too," she sighed, quite unaware of the shock on Daniel's face or the wide grin on David's. "Well, maybe I'll remember sometime."

She acquitted herself in the final round, however, with an accuracy and speed that left no room for criticism. The shadows were slanting lower by the time Daniel

propounded the last question: "What doth the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer teach us?"

It was Jeannie's turn. Taking a long breath, she chanted without a break:

"The-conclusion-of-the-Lord's-Prayer-which-is,- For  
thine-is-the-kingdom-and-the-power-and-the-glory-  
forever,-Amen-teacheth-us-to-take-our-encouragement-  
in-prayer-from-God-only-and-in-our-prayers-to-praise-  
him-ascribing-kingdom-power-and-glory-to-him;-and-  
in-testimony-of-our-desire-and-assurance-to-be-heard,-  
we-say-Amen!"

There was a sudden scattering to the evening work. It was six o'clock when the cold supper was eaten. Later Daniel and Sarah and the older girls sat stiffly in the sitting-room, reading. David wandered out restlessly, and Jeannie followed him. When they were out of sight of the house she slipped her hand in his, and he allowed it to stay.

"What you thinkin', Davy?"

"Oh, lots of things."

"Tell me."

"Oh, nothing." Then the boy's face took on a fierceness that startled her.

"I *hate* Sabbath!" he said. "I can't keep on doing the things Father wants me to do. I'd rather have been taking in the wheat than saying the catechism. Sometimes I think I'll do like Abram, and run away."

"Davy!" There was sheer terror in Jeannie's eyes. "You won't do that. Promise me you won't. I'd die without *you*, Davy. Promise me!"

He shook her arm gently from him. "Oh, I was just fooling. Come on, we'd better be going back."

At eight-thirty Daniel cleared his throat. It was a signal. Sarah laid aside Baxter's "Saint's Rest," which she had been reading, and the older girls closed their volume of Pollok's "Course of Time," which they had

shared. Jeannie drew a stool close to her mother's chair, and David slouched forward on the low lounge, his head in his hands.

Daniel opened his Bible at the appointed place and began again on the ceremonial of family prayers. A low rush of cool air came through the open window followed by a flash. There was a long reverberating peal. When they rose from their knees the rain was sweeping down upon the earth. Pouring, drenching, driving rain; filling the run in the meadow to a rushing river, laying low the young corn, raking the meadow grass with pitiless swords; killing and burying the wheat for ever. The wheat that a few hours ago was golden with promise.

No one spoke. There was only the relentless beat of the rain.

It was the end of the Sabbath.

## CHAPTER TWO

THE NEXT MORNING IT WAS STILL RAINING. NOT THE flashing of swords of the night before. This was more like tears; the slow, steady weeping of a hopeless sky. The family rose quietly. There was no whistle from David's room, and Daniel's step was heavy on the stair. Even Jeannie entered the kitchen without speech, her eyes for once frightened out of their natural brightness. There was no conversation during breakfast. Only the sound of the tears upon the porch roof. Morning prayers were a melancholy rite. When they were finished, Liza Jane and Betsy conferred with their mother. Washing was out of the question, but if the milk was ready they could churn. The older girls collected ladles and butter bowls, and then taking down two old shawls from the row of hooks behind the kitchen door, to throw over their heads, they ran down the steep path to the spring house.

The morning wore along somehow. Sarah and Jeannie attended to the housework. Daniel sat in the sitting-room with his Bible open before him. David tinkered with old bits of harness in the wagon shed behind the barn.

At ten o'clock he was thirsty. The girls ought to be through with the churning. He decided to go down to the spring house for a drink of the fresh buttermilk. He walked slowly through the rain. What did it matter if *he* got wet, he thought bitterly. The only thing that mattered—the wheat—was already ruined. And it could have been saved. His strong muscles ached with their futility. His feet made no sound as he went down the sodden path. The spring-house door was closed, but



the low voices within were quite audible. His hand, outstretched for the leather latch, fell suddenly to his side.

"It's worse even than losing the wheat, the thought of David unsaved." It was Liza Jane speaking.

"Oh, when I think of a sudden sickness or an accident befalling him, and him *lost*——" Betsy's shaking voice ended in a sob.

"It's strange he can't experience conversion, when all the others of us joined the church so early, even Jeannie. And Abram, Mother says, had made his profession before he ran away." Liza Jane's tone had an edge of severity.

Betsy always wept easily. It was plain now that her tears were flowing apace.

"Mebbe we ought to pray more together. 'Where two or three are gathered——' you know. We're all alone now. Why don't you lead, Liza Jane?"

David, his fists clenched, his face scarlet, waited for only a second more. But it was time enough for him to hear Liza Jane's clear, determined voice raised importunately.

"O Lord, look down upon our brother and turn his heart and make him feel the awful danger of his present state and bring him soon into the fold of safety——"

David leaped up the path, his rough boots sliding in the mud. He did not stop until he was in the barn. Then he climbed the ladder to the mow and threw himself upon the hay, every fibre of him angered, anxious, humiliated. For several months now, no one had spoken to him about joining the church. He had begun to think it had dropped from the family mind. And here the girls were praying for him *out loud*. What if a stranger had come along and heard what he had heard? His face flamed again. He felt trapped. He was in a squirrel cage. He had done most of the work on the wheat. It was his shoulders that had bent to the lurch of the plowing. He had harrowed and seeded and cradled. He

had put the best of his young strength into it because he had a hope in his heart. He had not meant to speak of it till the coming fall, when the crop would be well sold. He wanted to go to school, to Eldersridge Academy. He wanted to prepare for college and some day be a lawyer. And behind this wish and fostering it was another. He wanted to get away, to be free, free from everything—most of all from religion.

And here he was, with the wheat ruined—and the girls praying for him aloud in the spring-house!

He knew that if he waited longer the hot tears he was fighting would come to his eyes. He jumped up and, taking a bundle of hay, tore and wrenched and twisted it till his hands were sore. It was relief of a sort. His normal self-control slowly returned. He climbed down the ladder at last and whistling ostentatiously, made his way back to the house.

The table was set for dinner; the girls were back from their churning, and a visitor sat in the corner of the kitchen, steaming by the fire. It was old McKinstrie. His grayish hair was rampant as usual, his clothes dirty, his mouth dripping tobacco juice, and his smile cheerful. One long leg was stretched under the stove, and the other hitched back at the side of his chair according to his own idea of utter comfort. David sensed at once, also, a little undercurrent of excitement. Sarah had stopped her work at the stove, Liza Jane had gone as close to the caller as her keenly sensitive nose would allow her, and Jeannie's eyes were dancing with eagerness. Old McKinstrie always brought news.

"Well, David," the old man addressed him as he was hanging up his wet coat on a peg. Then the guest shifted his tobacco to the other cheek and resumed his conversation. "Yes, that's what I said, a show. Seems they was a medicine show come to Greensburg in the airy part of the month, an' this here girl danced to the music or



somethin'. Well, the woman of the show she took sick, an' before she died she made the doctor there promise to take this girl an' keep her till he could get her bound out to a good couple in the country. The woman said the girl was an orphan an' she'd promised to look out for her, an' she wanted her to get bound out to good people."

Old McKinstrie mopped up a small overflow of tobacco juice with the back of his hand, and went on.

"An' old Doc Sterrett was in at the county seat, and seen this other doctor an' heard the story, an' he knowed the Forsythes were jist lookin' round quiet for a smart girl, so he——"

"The Forsythes!" They all seemed to echo the word at once. "Big Bob's?"

"Yes'm. So Doc Sterrett come out an' told them about this girl, an' they went in on Satiddy an' seen her an' brung her out with 'em; an' she's there now, for I jist come from there——"

Old McKinstrie had to pause, for a new rill of tobacco juice had reached the end of his chin.

"Oh!" Jeannie cried, her hands in a quick unconscious gesture at her breast. "Did you see her? Did she dance?"

"Jeannie," Sarah's quiet voice admonished, "we won't mention anything about the dancing; we will forget that. The poor girl did what she was compelled to do in that—that show, but now at Mrs. Forsythe's she'll learn to do what's right——"

"An' *purty*," old McKinstrie went on. "My gosh—'scuse me, Mrs. McDowell. I mean I never seen a young one look like her. She's got sort o' black eyes like a pair o' candles burnin', an' loose black hair hangin', an' when she smiles at you, my gosh—'scuse me; I mean she sort o' gives you goose pimples."

"What's this? What's this?" Daniel demanded quickly

as he appeared from the sitting-room. His heavy brows were drawn. It was clear he did not approve of old McKinstrie in the kitchen, with the family hanging on his words. "What's all this?"

Jeannie burst headlong into the story, and Daniel's brows grew blacker as she proceeded.

"An' she's there now. Mr. McKinstrie's seen her!" she finished breathlessly.

Daniel made no comment; only he shut his thin lips tight as though for restraint. Then in a moment he used the time-honoured phrases for getting rid of old McKinstrie.

"Well, Mr. McKinstrie"—Daniel was meticulous with his prefixes—"call in again soon."

McKinstrie recalled both legs to a normal position and slowly and reluctantly stood upon them.

Sarah's kind heart always came to the rescue at this point. "Here's a wee lock of my cookies and a bit of this morning's churning for you"—thrusting the package in his hand. "Are the girls pretty well?"

Old McKinstrie accepted the donation as his just due and without thanks.

"Well, Liz, she's in her usual, but Mag seems dwiny these days. She may jist have took a skunner at something she et. Her stummick ain't right. Now that reminds me what I come for, Mrs. McDowell. A bit of boneset, if you've got any left. I think some boneset tea will fettle Mag."

"Run up and bring a bunch down, Jeannie," Sarah said quickly. "And tell the girls a good deal of its strength is out of it, hanging away so long. It will soon be time for the fresh. . . . Well, here it is, and I hope Mag is soon better. Tell her to eat light. Good-bye."

They got him out at last; but even after the door was closed behind him, his battered straw hat and tobacco-streaked face appeared again.

"Guess you won't need any help to bring in your wheat crop this year," he chuckled.

A faint surprise stole over his face as no one responded to his humour, but his attention was at once diverted by two sharp yaps behind him.

"If it ain't them golderned hounds—'scuse me—them hounds! I shet them in the coal-house as I was startin' up, an' here they're after me a'ready. Well, g'bye."

When they were sure he was out of sight Liza Jane, her long thin nostrils sniffing with dark suspicion, reopened the door and fanned the fresh air violently into the kitchen.

"If he wouldn't always come just at meal time it wouldn't be so bad. Or if the smell would only all go with him——"

"He does seem to leave the strongest part of him behind," Daniel put in dryly. "Well, is dinner ready?"

As they sat down to the table it was discovered that Jeannie was missing.

Betsy got up and looked out the window.

"There she goes, running down the hill like a killdeer after Mr. McKinstrie. I s'pose she wants to ask him something. She oughtn't to be so free with him. She never seems to realise she's grown up now."

"Oh, Jeannie's all right," David put in.

"Yes, you'd stand up for her no matter what she did," Betsy remarked rather acidly as she sat down again.

"She'll likely be back in a minute," Sarah said quietly to stop the argument.

Jeannie made her usual precipitous entrance, all but tipped over her chair, and clattered her knife and fork as she settled to the table. She was out of breath from running, but she could not wait to impart her news.

"Her name's *Terese*," she panted. "It s-sounds like a dancing girl, doesn't it? I j-just thought I'd find out before old—Mr. McKinstrie got away. Mother, I—I

want to go over to the Forsythes' soon and see her. Can I?"

"Jeannie," Daniel admonished solemnly, "in regard to this—this young person who has come to Mr. Forsythe's home, we will be kind to her, of course, as we have occasion, but there will be no association between her and any of you children until we are sure just what her character is. Do you all understand?"

He was looking at Jeannie, so her "Yes, sir" was allowed to pass for the group.

Daniel cleared his throat and went on.

"I think, David, we'll take the spring wagon and drive into New Salem this afternoon. Sarah, if you'll make out your list of absolute necessities——"

A little pall fell again upon them. Money was always scarce. They had all had good schooling in doing without the luxuries of life. But this year would be the worst they had known. Even the trifling comforts that they were wont to make much of would be lacking. It would be only the *absolute necessities* now.

Sarah and the older girls prepared the list carefully. They needed yeast, baking soda, salt, sugar, and coffee. As to the calico there was some doubt.

"If we could even get enough to make one new sun-bonnet and apron, we'd have one decent outfit among us. As it is now, suppose we'd have a sudden call to a neighbour's——" Liza Jane's face was older than her years as she spoke.

Sarah twisted the folds of her dress nervously; her own face was anxious. She turned at last to Betsy who was writing the list in her careful, slanting script.

"Put down—calico, dark blue and white, ten yards," she said. "That'll be fifty cents' worth, but I feel it's really needful."

Daniel took the list when he came out again to the kitchen and scanned it carefully, then put it in his inner

pocket without comment. He spoke in a low tone to Sarah, though, as he opened the door. She stepped out on the back porch beside him.

"I'll stop at Forsythe's and speak to Robert about the Session meeting Friday night. I hope he takes it in the right way. He's a good neighbour. It all lies heavy on my mind."

Sarah did not answer. She was looking off over the stricken wheat.

"But my duty was plain. I would have done what I did, if he had been my own brother."

"Yes," Sarah answered quietly, "I'm sure you would."

They stood silent a moment, and then Daniel shifted his feet.

"Well, I'll be getting along. About the calico. If they don't have a dark blue, what then?"

"Oh, a brown and white would do. Only I always think the blue looks cleaner. We really need some new sunbonnets and aprons, or I wouldn't get it just now."

"Well, well. We'll pull through some way, I suppose. Only we'll have to watch every penny from now on. It's going to be a bad winter, I doubt."

"Daniel, if I pinched the pattern I could mebbe get along with eight yards instead of ten——"

"Oh, no, we won't swallow the cow and choke on the tail that way. Besides, aprons save the dresses, and there'll be no new dresses for some time, I'm thinking. Well, I'll be getting along."

David was waiting in the spring wagon at the point where the barnyard merged into the lane. The slow tears of the morning had been stayed at last, and a glimmer of sun came through the heavy blue. Daniel climbed to his place and took the reins himself. The two rarely spoke when they were alone. Daniel, his brows knit, seemed usually occupied with his own serious thoughts, while David had a strange fear of his father that pre-

vented any free-and-easy conversation between them. Indeed, to the boy his father seemed as remote in spirit as God himself. He wished often that one of his older brothers was still at home. If Abram hadn't run away, or if Josiah hadn't died, he would have had some one to talk to familiarly. There were things he needed to talk over with somebody: intimate things that teased at his understanding and bewildered him. But to speak of them to his father would have been as preposterous as to discuss them with old Dr. McFeeters himself.

They had reached the big mulberry tree now on the edge of the Forsythe farm. Daniel slowed the horses and turned them into the tree-bordered lane that wound towards the house. At David's quick questioning glance he said only, "I have a little business with Mr. Forsythe."

Big Bob's house, unlike the severe McDowell brick, was a long rambling white clapboard that seemed to greet all comers with a drowsy friendliness from behind its green shutters. There was an air of prosperity, of comfortable living about the whole place. The great barn was white, too. So was the neat fence about the yard.

Big Bob was mending a broken paling as they drove in. He pushed back his wide straw hat, hitched up his overalls, and came genially towards the wagon as Daniel stopped. If he had heard the news of his approaching trial, he gave no sign.

"Well, Dan'l," he greeted cheerfully. "Well, David. Looks some as if it's goin' to fair up."

David had slid down to the ground, embarrassed, for he guessed the reason for his father's call.

"Robert," Daniel began, "I've come on a painful errand——"

Big Bob, glimpsing David's face, raised a finger.

"Jist a minute, Dan'l. Say, David, I've a *purty* strong suspicion that there's a fresh gingerbread in the kitchen. Go on in an' see the wife."



"Thanks, Mr. Forsythe, I'll just have a look at the stock. I won't be going in just now."

"Aw, get away in there an' get a hunk of gingerbread. If you get your teeth in that once, we'll have to come after you to fetch you. Like the old sow we used to have at home. We always had to pull her snout out to get her in the trough, an' then pull her tail out to get her away from it. Run along there an' tell the wife I sent you."

David did as he was bid, though a terrible shyness had overtaken him. He might see the new girl. As he walked up the broken stone path to the back door he could see Big Bob put one foot on the wheel hub and look quizzically into his neighbour's face.

"Well, Dan'l," he was remarking, "what's the verdict?"

David hurried up the back steps. The kitchen door was open, and a sweet spicy smell came in waves to meet him. He heard the sound of quick footsteps, and then suddenly before him stood—the bound girl.

But nothing less bound in spirit ever met Dzvid's eyes. Something uncaught, unconfined, a gay and ready unrestraint, sat upon her like a light garment. Her eyes were dark and laughing. Her hair was the colour of a blackbird's wing, and hung loosely upon her back, caught only at the neck by a ribbon.

As they faced each other David noticed more than her face. For the first time in his life he was acutely conscious of a girl's body. He saw now, as though the calico print had fallen from her, the tender fullness of her young breasts, the slim waist, the plumply curving limbs. His face was red with shame at his thought.

"Is—is Mrs. Forsythe here?" he stammered.

And then the girl smiled, and David's heart thumped in his breast.

"Come on in," she said, "and I'll tell Mother Forsythe.



That's what I'm to call her. Ain't it fine? I like it here a heap. Do you live anywheres near?"

"A couple of miles by road. It's just a little way across fields, though."

"What's your name?"

"David McDowell."

"Mine's Terese. I guess everybody will call me Terese Forsythe now. You know I'm livin' here for good."

David swallowed. She was even prettier when she talked. She ran now with a little dancing step to the back stairs and called, as though the words were still sweet with novelty, "Moth-er For-sythe!"

Mrs. Forsythe came hurrying down. She was a plump, pretty little woman, with motherliness written all over her, even though Fate had denied her children. But in spite of this sorrow the years had touched her lightly. Big Bob had taken good care of her. She had never heard a sharp word from his lips; nothing but unchanging tenderness through the years. And it showed in her serene, unlined face.

"Well, David! What a boy you are to smell fresh gingerbread. David, this is Terese. She's going to be our girl now. Shake hands with one of your new neighbours, Terese."

As the two clasped hands awkwardly, David felt a strange prickling sensation over his whole body. He was hot and then cold; and all because of a touch of this girl's fingers.

"How are the folks, David? Run an' get a glass of milk for him, Terese, while I cut the gingerbread. Tell the girls to come over an' see us soon, David. Jeannie and Terese must be about an age. Here, set right down an' enjoy yourself!"

David mumbled his thanks and tried to eat the gingerbread, but for once the fragrant morsel seemed difficult to swallow. For watching him with dark, laughing

eyes was Terese, perched like an exotic bird on the edge of the kitchen table.

Mrs. Forsythe chattered on, unconscious of David's inner turmoil. He was always a silent lad. When the last crumb was finished, Big Bob appeared in the doorway. There was an unfamiliar tenseness about his lips.

"I guess your dad's about ready to move on, David. Wisht you didn't have to hurry."

Mrs. Forsythe was all amazed solicitude.

"Ain't Daniel comin' in? Why, my! I have a bite of cake all cut for him. Run along, David, an' tell your father I said——"

But Big Bob's voice stopped her. It was gentle as always, but final.

"Naw, I guess Dan'l ain't comin' in to-day, Martha. Well, good-bye, David. Come over, all you young uns. We've got a girl in the house now, you know."

David said good-bye hurriedly. He had not meant to look at Terese, but he could not help it. He turned at the door and met her eyes. Once again the strange flash went through him. It was as though till now his body had been a mere dead machine. Now it was living, quivering flesh and blood.

"Well, good-bye, and—and thanks," he repeated, and hurried down the steps and along the path.

He jumped into the spring wagon beside his father, who was waiting with the horse headed up the lane. They rode on in silence past the familiar fields. When they were almost at New Salem, Daniel addressed his son.

"Did you see the new girl?"

"Yes," the boy answered.

"What is she like?"

David swallowed twice. "I didn't really notice," he said.

It was the blackest lie he had ever told.

They had come in sight now of the little village that lay cupped in the hills along the Loyalhanna Creek. Its long street was part of the old Pittsburgh-Philadelphia turnpike, over which most of the townsmen's Scotch-Irish forbears had originally made their patient pioneering way with their goods and families upon pack horses. Probably most of these had dreamed of reaching the richer and more level fields of Ohio; but for one reason or another they had paused here, some thirty miles east of Pittsburgh, and remained.

The village now was the centre of the large agricultural community about it. The flour mill was here, the tannery, and the blacksmith shops. Here dwelt also the cabinetmaker, the weaver, and the tailor. But most important of all, here was Galloway's General Store, which served both as emporium and as bank to all the farmers of the countryside. For there was nothing which Galloway's did not handle. They accepted the farmers' wheat, oats, potatoes, butter, eggs, ham, and sausage, and entered the value of the produce in the credit side of the huge ledger. Then they dispensed groceries, ploughs, gum boots and calico; horse collars and hairpins; tenpenny nails and neckties, setting the same down in the debit columns of the farmers. There were no receipts asked for or given. Some time during the year each farmer made a formal call on Colonel Galloway as he sat at his desk in a far dark corner of the long, narrow building. He asked the Colonel, a little nervously, how he stood, and after the long accounting, accepted the report without question.

It was due to this method of economics that very little actual money passed through the hands of the farmers during the year. In one sense they were not poor men, even those who had least. When crops were good, they lived a self-contained if frugal life. It was their own wheat that the busy humming mill on the Loyalhanna

ground into flour ; it was the wool from their own sheep that old Jerry Kelly the weaver made into flannels. It was the hides from their own cattle that were converted into leather at the tannery, and then changed again into shoes and boots in the cobbler's shop.

The little town seemed to need small help from the outside world. Even in great emergencies, it was sufficient to itself. Old Dr. Sterrett had performed many an operation on a kitchen table with a white-faced man and woman beside him holding a candle. And when a large sum of money was needed suddenly—as when a barn was burned down by lightning, or a young fellow got into trouble with a girl—Galloway's would always advance the amount and take a mortgage.

No one knew how many mortgages were held by Galloway, for mortgages were a source of shame. When one man said to his neighbour, "He's mortgaged," he always lowered his voice, for it meant that the man would perhaps never be free again. And no man with the blood of the Scottish Highlands in his veins takes kindly to being enslaved.

Daniel and David had reached the long covered wooden bridge now that spanned the creek. The horse sounded the first planks gingerly with its forefeet, and then proceeded. The wagon made a deep rumbling sound as it advanced. Through the wide cracks in the floor the water showed clearly.

The bridge had been a great triumph some thirty years before. All the older people of the community could remember its building. They still chuckled over the famous story of the granting of the appropriation. Major Morehead, who for many years represented that end of the state in the legislature, had made a stirring speech at the spring session, asking for state money to build the bridge. An irate opponent had leaped to his feet.

"Nonsense!" he shouted. "The gentleman from the

western counties exaggerates! The Loyalhanna Creek is nothing but a frog pond."

Major Morehead eyed his opponent gravely and then stated:

"Just a week ago I rescued something from drowning in the Loyalhanna which bore much more resemblance to the gentleman who has just spoken than to a *frog*!"

He got the appropriation. And the bridge now seemed as though it had always been.

The spring wagon had reached the end and stopped before the tollhouse. Old Mrs. Gilson, her untidy hair flying, ran out to collect the toll herself. Daniel placed a nickel in her hand. A two-horse conveyance cost a dime, so Daniel always drove the light wagon when possible.

"Well, Mr. McDowell, how are you the day? Aye, this weather's enough to fair sicken you. It's serious for the crops."

She looked both ways and lowered her voice.

"Hist! Just a minute. I've been keekin' out the window lookin' for some one from out Confluence way. Tell me, is it so about Big Bob Forsythe? They're sayin' round the mill that he took in his wheat *on the Sabbath*!"

Daniel cleared his throat. Mrs. Gilson was a proverbial news gatherer. Her position at the tollhouse was favourable. She could tell with exactness who had passed through the bridge and why, by day; and who had lingered too long in its intimate shadows by night. So Daniel spoke guardedly.

"I believe that is so."

Mrs. Gilson, finding no more information forthcoming, drew back from the wagon.

"Aye, it's a wonder the hand of the Lord wouldn't smite him dead. Well, I doubt his crop will be the only wheat ground at the mill *this year*!"

Daniel slapped the reins, and they moved on. A long



row of hitching posts connected by iron bars accommodated the traffic at Galloway's. Three horses were already tied there when Daniel and David got out of the wagon. Old Ben Gilson, in dirty shirt and overalls, sat on the wide stone store step, his torn straw hat shoved back on his head, one thin shank, weighted down by a heavy wrinkled cowhide shoe, crossed in the air and keeping time to some inaudible tune. His watery blue eyes were fixed wistfully upon the tavern across the way, from which one or two of his cronies were emerging. Daniel glanced darkly at him, and then across at the old stone house opposite. The tavern had been built in the early days when the Conestoga wagons and the stage coaches rumbled over the ruts and stones, the mountains and the valleys of the Pittsburg and Philadelphia Pike, and along the main street of the village of New Salem, which was a part of it. Now for nearly twenty years the Pennsylvania Railroad had been built, and there was only the occasional flourish of a stage driver's whip and and hustle and bustle of many guests at once at the tavern. But the old stone house still stood, square and solid and secretive, keeping old secrets of whisky-hot quarrels and tender love sighs and low-voiced political intrigues. It had sheltered soldiers and judges and adventurers and plain wayfaring men. And all kinds of women had leaned upon its wide stone window sills and peered down upon the sleeping village. One of Philadelphia's famous beauties had once been housed there, and once, too, a tall brunette who knew more international secrets than she was telling; sometimes a girl with a painted face had stepped from the stage and asked for lodgings as boldly as any one. There was loud laughter in the tap-room that night, and the hotel-keeper winked his eye at his guests. He had to keep a well-managed, respectable hostelry, but of course he couldn't see all that went on, and didn't try to.

But now, even though the old heyday of the tavern was past, it still stood, a prominent part of the town and yet not truly of it; rather a crystallisation of the unknown. Those who had come and gone in the old times, eating and sleeping and making love there, had been only romantic shadows to the townsfolk of New Salem. And now in these later days it still held the colour of the unreal. For the tap-room, since the Temperance movement had gained force, had become a place of lurid damnation: a place to be discussed in eager, hushed tones. Any young man who entered there was a brand to be snatched from the burning. And the old habitués like Ben Gilson were removed in the mind of the town to a plane of remote and evil significance. Meanwhile old Jeremiah O'Neil, who had owned the tavern for forty years, sat on a stout chair just outside the bar-room door in summer, and inside by the coal fire in winter, friendly yet inscrutable like the stone house itself, knowing more of life than any one else in the town—and saying less.

Daniel had included David in his glance towards the tavern. His eyes seemed to repeat what his lips had often said: that he would rather follow a son of his to the grave than see him go through the bar-room door. He gave a brief greeting to old Gilson on the steps, and then he and David together entered Galloway's. There was a dim coolness about the long building, and a damp mixed smell of textiles and cheeses and hardware. Daniel went straight to the back of the store, where Colonel Galloway himself came forward to greet him. The Colonel was a strong-featured, portly man with a dignified bearing. If there had been a bank in the town he would have been its president. If there had been a board of directors he would have been chairman. Since New Salem had neither, he presided over the general store, lending to it an institutional dignity. He met Daniel affably, for



while he was not among those whom the Colonel respected for their financial standing, Daniel was one of the few men in the community whose mentality was such as to draw deference.

"Well, well, well, Mr. McDowell, how are you to-day? Too much rain! Too much rain, eh? The Lord opened the bottles of heaven this time. Wheat ruined, eh? Um—um—too bad! Make a hard winter for all of us."

He beckoned Daniel to one side. "Is it true Big Bob Forsythe took his wheat in yesterday?"

Daniel nodded.

"Well, well, well! It lies between him and the Lord, but I'm glad I'm not an Elder in the Confluence church. You are, Mr. McDowell?"

"Yes," said Daniel heavily.

"Ah, hard things have to be done sometimes even betwixt friends. Well, what can I do for you to-day, Mr. McDowell?"

"Just a few staples, Colonel, and I want to look at scythes later."

The Colonel signed to the boy behind the grocery counter, and then, to David's surprise, he came over to where he was standing.

"David, how are you to-day? How's your mother and those pretty sisters of yours?" Without waiting for him to answer, the Colonel signed for him to come to the long dry-goods counter. He had a pleased air of secrecy.

"Lookit!" he said in a harsh whisper, as he opened a big pasteboard box. "Lookit what just come in from Philadelphia. And only ten cents. Pure white cambric and lace-edged!"

He was holding up for David's embarrassed inspection a handkerchief of what seemed to the boy an incredible daintiness.

"Now," said the Colonel, "if you'd like one for your little sister, mebbe——"

David fingered the two coins in his pocket. One was a dime. He had had it for several months. He drew it forth and laid it on the counter with a half-glance over his shoulder. His father was busy with his own affairs and had seen nothing. David pushed the dime beside the Colonel's hand.

"I'll take one," he said thickly.

"That's right. That's right. Fine value. Sure to please the ladies. A lad like you usually has a sister or another girl that he'd like to give a present to, eh, David? Here you are! Here you are! Something else?"

"No, sir," David stammered, crimson to his ears, for the Colonel's shot had gone home. The handkerchief was not for his sister. He had a feeling of treachery towards Jeannie which he appeased somewhat by buying her a large penny mint stick.

As he was stuffing this into his pocket he heard an arresting voice behind him. He turned quickly to see the young minister of the day before coming through the store with Mr. Henderson. The latter was piloting him towards Colonel Galloway.

"Colonel, meet Mr. Richards—James Richards. He's almost a Reverend, preached fine for us out at Confluence yesterday when Dr. McFeeters was away at Synod. Now, I'll let him tell you his story while I do an errand or so back in the store."

David, watching and listening, was impressed with the quiet ease of the young stranger. He seemed even taller now, as opposed to the Colonel's rotund figure, than he had looked in the pulpit. His smile was friendly and natural.

"Colonel Galloway? I'm glad to know you, sir. I'm looking for a position as teacher for the coming winter. It's necessary for me to earn a little money before I can finish my theological course. Mr. Henderson says you are the proper person to see in regard to the New

Salem school. Would it be worth my while to apply here?"

The Colonel had been eyeing him keenly. He removed his glasses now and shook his head.

"Now this is too bad, Mr. Richards. Too bad! We've engaged a young man already. And I doubt if his qualifications equal yours. Tut, tut, tut! Just the other day I promised him. Can't go back on my word, you know. What about a country school, eh?"

"I guess I'll have to try that," the young man said gravely. "It's necessary for me to get work."

The Colonel turned and signed to Daniel, who had completed his purchases and was starting for the front of the store carrying a new scythe.

"Here, Mr. McDowell, I guess you know more of this young man than I do. Preached fine for you, I hear, yesterday. He wants a school and we're all tied up in New Salem. What about Painter Hollow Is it let yet?"

Daniel put down his scythe and extended a hand to the stranger.

"Mr. Richards, this is good news. I heard you wished to teach a year, but other matters this morning had driven the idea from my mind. I can promise you our country school—Painter Hollow—and twenty dollars a month. Would you be interested?"

"It's only six dollars less than we pay here," the Colonel put in.

The young man was silent for a moment. David noted the strong lines of his face, the high forehead and the firm chin.

"I'll take it," he said suddenly. "And I hope I'll satisfy you, Mr. McDowell. I will have references sent you at once from some of my professors."

Mr. Henderson, who had joined the group again in time to hear the last part of the conversation, slapped his leg.

"That's fine, now. I sort of hoped you'd work back to

Painter Hollow. We're nearest the schoolhouse, so we usually board the teachers. Mother'll take you in for a dollar and a half a week if that there's satisfactory to you."

The young man thought again for a moment, and then smiled his frank smile.

"Agreed," he said. "And now I'll say good-bye to you, Mr. McDowell, and to you, Colonel. Thank you for your help. Mr. Henderson is going to drive me into Greensburg to get a train. I'm due back at the Seminary to-night. You see, I'm working summers. One more will finish my course. Good-bye, and thank you again."

When he was gone, the Colonel scratched his head thoughtfully.

"If I ain't mistaken, yon's a fine young man."

"Just my own impression," said Daniel. "I'm pleased beyond measure to have gotten him for Painter Hollow! Of course, if he's a failure, the blame is all on me," he added.

"Yes," the Colonel chuckled, "him that owns the cow has to stand nearest the tail, you know, for either the milk or the kick. Well, in this case I don't think you'll have to bother about the kick. Good-bye, Mr. McDowell! Neat little piece of work you turned over. Good-day, David. Come shopping again, won't you?"

He winked at David, and the boy felt as though the bit of white cambric in his pocket was on fire.

When the two reached home, there was no sign of rain in the sky. A bland light of pale gold lay across the fields. Daniel told his news at the supper table. It was received first by a clatter of cutlery, for Jeannie in her excitement dropped her knife and fork on her plate.

"Oh, *goody*! It'll be fun going to school this year! Don't you wish you wasn't too old to go, Betsy?"

Betsy's face was crimson with emotion. She swallowed twice.

"Where's he going to board?" she asked with a futile attempt at casualness.

"At the Hendersons'," Daniel stated calmly. "Mr. Henderson spoke for him at once, and young Richards agreed. Well, I'm hoping he will do much to elevate the tone of our young people this winter."

Betsy's face had fallen, though it was still flushed, and she ate little more. Liza Jane's lips had a bitter line.

"I don't see why the Hendersons always snap up the teachers. There's others besides them in the district could stand a little extra money."

When the older girls were at last in their own room, they spoke freely of the whole matter. Betsy's easy tears were flowing apace.

"It's cruel the Hendersons got him! It's plain cruel. It 'ud have been a chance in a lifetime for us, having a young man in the house here. We'd have gotten acquainted so well—he might—he would almost sure—"

Even before Liza Jane, who shared all her secrets, Betsy's voice stammered.

"I don't see why Father couldn't have spoke up," Liza Jane said. "It's Father that gives out the school. Why shouldn't we have had him to board? Not that it would have made much difference as far as *I'm* concerned," she added bitterly.

"You—you never know," Betsy put in loyally, though in her own heart she was convinced that Liza Jane had no chance.

As usual Liza Jane first recovered her grip on the practical.

"Well, he's going to be in the community, and he'll be at singin' school; and Mother will be sure to ask him often for supper and the night. That's something, when you consider all in the way of young men we usually have round here!"

Betsy spent a longer time than usual on her knees that

night. Her petitions were more than ever a painful cross between the expression of her real desire and maidenly fear that such confession to a male Divinity was indelicate.

Perhaps because there were the new cross-currents of thought, the week ran a quicker course than usual towards Friday, the day upon which the trial of Big Bob had been set.

On the night of the Session meeting, supper was dispatched earlier than usual, and with little conversation. The older girls had cleaned the big square parlour thoroughly during the day. The long wooden settee, the straight horsehair chairs, the two side tables with their symmetrically piled books at each end, were all dusted and ready. The girls as they worked had not entirely succeeded in making their anxiety over Big Bob's sin rise above the pleasurable excitement which the unusual always brought to their quiet lives.

Sarah's eyes, however, were sad that evening, and Daniel's face was set.

The men came promptly, all on horseback, old Dr. McFeeters first. He was a tall, spare old gentleman in a shiny black coat. His hair was white and grew long upon his neck, as though to atone for the fact that the top of his head was completely bare. He had the large-boned features of the Scottish race, strong and self-controlled, but there was no lurking humour in his cold gray eyes, and no lines of sympathy about the mouth. One could imagine him going to the stake for his convictions with fervour and fortitude; but it was more difficult to picture him laying his hand upon the head of a sinner to say, "Neither do I condemn you." His sermons dealt unequivocally with the hard dry bones of doctrines.

His countenance was more forbidding than usual this evening. He came into the sitting-room and greeted each member of the family with grave emphasis, then



was ushered by Daniel into the parlour. The other men, solemn-faced, too, came into the house as David led their horses away to tie them at the barn.

Big Bob arrived last. His hearty voice sounded as usual, though Sarah noted that his eyes were haggard. Daniel met him in the hall and invited him stiffly to join the others. Big Bob tried to make a smiling entrance.

"Good-evenin', Reverend! Good-evenin', gentlemen. Now, it's too bad you all have to take this here much trouble on account of me——"

"Let us open the meeting with prayer," Dr. McFeeters said distinctly, and Daniel closed the door.

The girls went back to their work in the kitchen, but Sarah sat down on the stairs close by the parlour. It was not eavesdropping. It was only that she had to know what went on there, and Daniel would not repeat half.

The prayer was long, with many references to Moses and the Ten Commandments leading up to an emphatic repetition of the fourth: "Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work."

There was a subdued nervous cough from Big Bob.

At last the prayer was over and Dr. McFeeters' voice began again, reading from a paper that rustled as he progressed. It stated Big Bob's offence in dignified phraseology. It did not say he had taken in his wheat on the Sabbath. It said that he had performed manual labour of so shocking a nature on the seventh day of the week, breaking the holy ordinance of God, that unless he showed proper repentance and made public avowal of his sin, he could no longer remain in the fellowship and communion of the Confluence Presbyterian Church.

Sarah's hands were clenched. Of course they had to do this, but——

Dr. McFeeters was calling upon the various members of the Session to ask if they had anything to add to



what had been read. No one had. Sarah, listening, sensed the tenseness of the air within the parlour.

"And now, Mr. Forsythe, as brethren together in the Lord, we urge you to make your peace with God after this flagrant disobedience to His will. Have you anything to say in the hearing of this Session?"

There was a strained creak from one of the chairs as Big Bob's huge bulk rose from it. Sarah pressed closer to the door.

"Well, Reverend an' members of the Session, I ain't much at speakin', an' I'm still poorer at prayin', I guess, as you all know, an' yet I aim to do what's right as fur as I can see it. So I'd jest like to say that about bringin' in this wheat now——" He cleared his throat noisily.

"As I was settin' here I jist thought of a story about my father back in Indiana County. He wasn't a churchgoin' man. An' oncet when I was a boy we got a new preacher out from the city that didn't know a hate about country ways. He come out one afternoon to see my father about his soul's salvation, an' Pap, he was busy in the orchard waitin' for a swarm of bees to settle.

"The preacher he'd been out before when Pap was in the middle of somethin' he couldn't stop very handy, so this day there was no puttin' him off. He knelt right down by a bit of a low stump an' started prayin'. But the trouble was he had on a pair of them thin 'sherravally' ridin' britches, an', it bein' a hot day, he had little or nothin' under them. The colour of 'em must 'a' kinda took the bees' eye, for they started settlin' right on the preacher's"—Big Bob coughed politely—"on the end of him, as you might say, that was uppermost at the time, an' before he could be got out of the orchard he was stung so he wouldn't be settin' down to write sermons for a spell an' my Pap had lost a good June swarm of bees.

"I was a young shaver, but I can mind as I come along after the fracas I heard my Pap say, 'Reverend,' says he,

'there's times for prayin' an' there's times for scappin' bees, but,' says he, 'it's my opinion the Lord expects you to use your common sense about mixin' 'em.' Now, you see, I kinda thought——"

Sarah, on the stairs, had put her head forward suddenly in her hands, a little hysterical quiver of laughter going through her. But Dr. McFeeters' voice cut sharply in.

"Mr. Forsythe, this is no time for levity and light words. A grave charge has been brought against you. Do you, then, feel no repentance for breaking the holy Sabbath day?"

"Yes, sir," Big Bob assured him, almost with eagerness. "Yes, sir, I am terrible sorry I broke the Sabbath. I am that."

Dr. McFeeters' tone relaxed somewhat.

"Ah, we are glad to know that—that—your heart has been touched. And are you willing to stand up before the congregation and express that sorrow publicly?"

Big Bob hesitated a moment.

"Well, that's a purty hard proposition for a man like me; but if you all think it's necessary, I'm willin'."

Sarah left her post precipitately. It was all over, then, except the final words and prayer. She felt rather shaken. But, at least, now Big Bob would not be put out of the church.

The men came awkwardly out of the parlour, stood talking for a few moments on the small front porch, then, more at ease, as they got farther from the house, sauntered towards the barn where the horses were tied and discussed the weather and the crops in more detail. Dr. McFeeters had already bestriden his horse and gone on home. But Big Bob edged his way through the sitting-room and on to the kitchen.

"Well, Mrs. McDowell, how are you? Can I have a drink? I'm as dry as a horse that's been drove ten miles in the heat!"

Sarah hurried to get a glass from the cupboard and dipped it into the bucket of spring water that stood on a dough-tray on the back porch. The girls, embarrassed, had slipped away. Big Bob drank heavily.

"I'll have another. This thing of bein' prayed over is hot work when you ain't used to it."

When he had finished he looked down at Sarah's face with an odd twinkle in his eye. He glanced over his shoulder and then lowered his voice.

"They almost got me, though. It was a close shave. You see, if they'd of asked me if I was sorry I *took in the wheat*, I'd of had to say no. But when they put it, was I sorry I broke the Sabbath, I could say yes. An' that let me out by the skin of my teeth."

Sarah knew she should feel a righteous condemnation, but something of sympathy must have shown in her eyes, or Big Bob would not have thus confided in her.

"This standin' up before the congregation is goin' to be purty bad. I'd ruther take my chances on goin' to hell any time, if it was jist myself I was thinkin' of. But Martha, she'd worry, so I guess I'll have to go the whole hog, as the sayin' is, about this repentin' business. Well—good-night, Mrs. McDowell."

Sarah's lip quivered in spite of her.

"I'm—I'm sorry, Mr. Forsythe. I hate to think it was Daniel—and the meeting at our house, too——"

Big Bob grasped her hand in his huge one.

"That's all right. Dan'l's a good man. I don't hold a grudge again him for this. But I'm sort of glad you ain't quite as hidebound as Dan'l. Tell you what I'll do."

He lowered his voice and winked.

"I'll slip you over a good sack of flour this winter when yours gets low! Only don't tell Dan'l it's made out of the Sabbath-breakin' wheat."

Big Bob went out of the kitchen door as Daniel entered from the sitting-room.

"Has Robert gone?" he asked.

"Yes," Sarah answered. "Just now. He came out here for a drink of water."

Daniel put one foot on a kitchen chair and rested his crossed arms upon his knee, a favourite position.

"I feel a load lifted from my mind," he began. "Robert seemed at the last to come to full repentance. I had grave doubts of his attitude during the first part of the meeting. He seemed almost sacrilegious at one time—told one of his stories. Then suddenly, his heart seemed to be touched. There could be no question but that the Spirit was working mightily in our midst. Dr. McFeeters' closing prayer would have touched the most hardened sinner. Well, well, I'm glad it's past. By the way, where is David? He was nowhere to be seen when the men came to leave."

Sarah looked up in surprise. "David? Why, where could he be? Is Star in the barn?"

"I'll just take a look," Daniel said, and went out. But he was back in a moment to report the colt in her stall.

"He must have gone to one of the neighbours'," he said. "Strange for him to go without saying something. Well, it's time we got to bed."

But Sarah did not sleep till she heard a quick boyish foot on the stairs an hour later.

The next morning at breakfast David said merely, in answer to his father's question, that he had taken a long walk. Jeannie looked up in quick surprise. A walk was not a customary form of diversion after a day's work in the fields. Betsy had already noted the colour in his cheeks under the tan when Sarah in her quiet way changed the subject.

But David had told the truth as far as he had gone. He had strolled about restlessly the evening before, after tying the saddle horses to the barn fence. He had tried to surmise what was going on in the parlour. But every

thought of Big Bob only brought to his mind the image of the bound girl. He had put on his good shirt in honour of the strange importance of the evening, so now close above his heart was the handkerchief he had bought for Terese. At last, as the young moon rode higher, he found himself striking off through the fields in the direction of the Forsythes'.

He crossed the dead wheat fields, skirted the hay stubble, and finally entered the sugar meadow which joined the neighbouring farm. He walked more slowly here among the great maple trees that a few months before had poured out their sweet bounty. David was unconscious of any definite decision as to what he would do if he reached the Forsythes'. He only knew it eased his restlessness to be hurrying in that direction.

Suddenly he stopped. Under one of the farthest trees was the form of a young girl dancing. It was the bound girl. She was barefoot, her black hair swinging loose as she dipped and swayed and pirouetted beneath the branches. David had never seen any one dance like this. The heavy stepping and swinging of the square dances of the countryside was far different. As he watched her now, he was once again acutely conscious of the beauty of her body. He meant to slip away ; but Terese turned suddenly, saw him, started with fright, and then, smiling, came towards him through the moonlight.

"My, I was scared till I saw it was you," she said. "I oughtn't be here. Mother Forsythe thinks I'm in bed. But I get a funny feeling sometimes. I feel I got to dance like I used to in the show. Mother Forsythe thinks it's wicked, so I just slip off. Was—was you comin' to our house?"

David flushed. "Oh, I'm just—out for a walk. I was in town the other day and I got this." He drew out the paper which contained the handkerchief. "I thought mebbe you'd like it," he stammered.

The girl opened the paper wonderingly. She drew out the bit of white cambric and fingered it. She was so long looking up that David grew anxious. But when she did raise her eyes, they were shining with tears.

"I ain't had so many presents," she said as if in apology.

A wave of tenderness coupled with longing smote David. For a moment they looked at each other, and then he was clasping her soft, yielding body to his own. He kissed her—a long, new rapture, from which they emerged startled and shy.

"I—I got to go back," Terese whispered. "And I'll keep the handkerchief always, David, always!"

She started abruptly for the Forsythe field by which in a few moments she would reach the house. Then she stopped suddenly and came back. The moonlight was brighter now, and the bound girl's face was touched with a faery whiteness.

"I like you, David," she said, very low.

"I like you," he answered.

Then, as though struggling with the strange force that had caught them both in its power, they turned from each other and hurried away in opposite directions, leaving the sugar meadow empty, yet peopled for ever with memories of their first kiss.



### CHAPTER THREE

FROM THE MOMENT HE HAD OVERHEARD LIZA JANE AND Betsy praying for him in the spring-house, David had felt a sickish distaste for every one's society, most of all his own. He lay in bed at night, sleepless for the first time in his healthy young life, wondering despairingly what was the matter with him. He tried to pray in the heavy phraseology of his father and the other Elders; but the words sounded empty, and he gave it up. The part of him that should be prostrating itself before an angry God, crying for mercy, steeping itself in repentance, was in fact doing nothing of the kind. He felt within himself only a dull, heavy weight where he supposed his soul must be lodged. That the Devil was constantly tempting him, he could have no doubt, for when he stopped praying and relaxed utterly from his efforts to gain real conversion, his mind immediately carried him to the sugar meadow where, in the moonlight, he had seen Terese dancing. He saw it all again with an intensity that filled him with a sweet throbbing pain. He saw the green leaves overhead. He smelled the pennyroyal and heard the husky ripple of the little stream. He saw in the dappled shadows the girl's waving arms and leaping limbs, blending their strange movements into the mystery of the night. He pressed his hot face in the pillow as he remembered the kiss, the feel of her soft pliant body in his arms. He burned at the thought of his consuming desire then—and now.

Each night, before he finally slept, he made one last agonised appeal to God to release him from the bondage of his sin. But he always dreamed, as he tossed back and forth on his straw tick, of Terese's great dark eyes



looking up startled and shining into his own, and of the way her arms swayed together beneath the sugar tree.

In the mornings David wakened heavy-hearted. The familiar breakfast clatter annoyed him. He avoided the concerned glances of Betsy and Liza Jane. He felt a great irritation at their solicitude. He ate silently and hurried to the barn, where for a few minutes at least he had rest from himself. The beasts were placid, natural, comfortable. He stroked Star's nose, and ran the curry comb carefully over the flanks of the plough horses. He wanted to be close to them, to have the consolation of their normality, to feel the tranquillity of the common experiences of their animal lives. They ate and slept and mated, drank from the streams and rolled on the green grass, with a kind of physical sanctity. They never knew any torment of soul. They were neither cold nor hot before the wrath of God. They knew no sin. Their desires did not consume them. They had only calm, healthy satisfactions.

David felt all this in a blurred, wordless understanding. He came back to Star, put his arms around her neck, and pressed his head against her coat. He longed desperately to steal out to the barn at night when the torture overtook him, to lie down on the clean hay beside her. He would be one with them then, Star and Prince and Nellie and Whitey. He would hear, instead of the voice of conscience, only the soft mouthings of the beasts, their easy, sleepy movements. He would smell the dried clover and the grainy odour from the bran bins along the wall. He would see the stars through the upper part of the door which in summer was always left open. He knew he could sleep there as he used to, before these dark things came upon him.

But once he was out in the fields, each day he felt the mental weight fall again heavily. His clear, logical young mind went step by step over the path by which

one must approach conversion. It was like repeating an old lesson. He knew so well the key words that belonged to it.

"All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under His wrath and curse, and so made liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself and to the pains of hell for ever." He repeated the words over and over as he drilled in the upper field for corn.

"God having out of His mere good pleasure elected some to everlasting life . . ." He grew dramatic, for there was no one to hear him. He felt that perhaps by the very intensity of their repetition these words of the shorter catechism would shake his apathetic soul with fear, so that like poor old Shorty McClure he would run trembling and whimpering to Dr. McFeeters, crying, "What must I do to be saved?" The thought was horrible to him, and yet he would go any length for peace. He felt sure that the torture of body would leave him when he had experienced a conversion of soul.

One afternoon, as he swung his scythe around the upper meadow, a quick, gentle rain began to fall. David scanned the heavens with a practised eye. The shower would be brief, but in a few moments he knew it would be heavy. He ran, loping over the stubble to the big oak in the corner of the field. His shirt was wet through already, and the coolness of it felt pleasant to his sun-burned shoulders. He stood leaning against the tree trunk, his lean young frame relaxed, the tenseness suddenly gone from his eyes. He drew in long breaths of the clean air, washed by the rain. There was the smell of the fresh-cut clover in it, and of the primroses growing along the fence. There was a hint of ripe berries and of pennyroyal, too, as the wind blew from the Whitehorn, and through it all the deep warm earth smell that satisfied and nourished.

On the opposite hill the sun was shining down from

a blue sky. There was peace and beauty everywhere. Suddenly there came over David a revulsion of feeling that amazed him. It was as though another person had risen up strong and combative within him. The words with which he had been haranguing his soul all week now stood out blackly before him.

"All mankind . . . are under His wrath and curse. . . ."

"I don't *believe* it!" he shouted aloud. "It isn't so! Why would God hate us and curse us for ever? We haven't been bad enough to send us to hell for all eternity. I don't *believe* it! Who *could* believe it on a day like this?"

For several minutes he stood as one emancipated, looking over the meadow and the hills, lifting his face to the spattering drops that fell through the leaves, feeling light and happy again. This was the reason, then, that he couldn't feel honestly crushed **with** the weight of his sin. This was the reason he had **not** been able to work himself up to the point of decision. **Maybe**, after all, a conversion wasn't necessary. **Maybe** . . .

In the release of his new thoughts he stretched his arms above his head, feeling the delicious tautness of his strong muscles. He felt so vigorous, so whole again, so glad. He wanted to jump on Star's back and gallop to New Salem. He wanted to tear across the fields in the rain to the sugar meadow and dance as Terese had done beside the stream. He wanted to forget he had a soul and feel only the warm upleaping of the blood in his body.

And then—as he raised his eyes, he saw his father's figure, a little stooped as always, but moving strongly, resolutely towards him across the meadow, heedless of the rain. His arms dropped to his sides. The new freedom disappeared as though it had never been. Instead came the awful consciousness of his new defection. Unbelief! If his father had heard the words he just uttered it would have broken his heart.

Daniel came steadily on and joined his son under the tree. His face was very grave.

"David," he said earnestly, "you are constantly in my thoughts these days. I am praying that you may see your way clear to make your calling and election sure at the coming Communion. You are twenty now—old enough to feel the weight of your sin and your need of salvation. Don't delay, my son." His face grew suddenly piteous. "Death comes as a thief in the night. Just because you're young, you must not feel that you're sure of life. David, I can't rest till I'm sure you've made your peace with God."

David felt his throat tighten. It was all upon him again: the black burden of his thoughts, the losing fight. Added to it was the new shame of his denial a few minutes before. It leaped now to terrorising dimensions. He saw himself an unbeliever, an *infidel*. A cold hopelessness enveloped him. His face stiffened in misery. But he answered his father calmly. Anything but self-control between them would have seemed indecent to them both.

"I'm considering, Father," he said briefly.

Daniel turned his head that the boy might not see the blur in his eyes.

"It's clearing over to the east," he stated casually. "But I'm afraid the hay's too wet now for any more cutting. Would you just as soon go over to Forsythe's and see about borrowing an extra whetstone? Ours are all getting worn down. I'll get a new one in town Saturday."

David started with relief.

"I'll go right away," he said. "I'll ride Star." And he set off for the barn on a run, leaving his father still standing under the oak tree.

Nothing could have been more to David's liking at the moment than the trip to the Forsythes'. Not merely

because he might see Terese, but because the whole atmosphere of the neighbouring farm was so easy and cheerful and free. Mrs. Forsythe would be solicitous until she had appeased his natural boyish hunger with cookies or fresh gingerbread, but no one of them would be in the least concerned over his soul's salvation. Big Bob might have a story to tell, and certainly would find something to laugh at in his uproarious fashion. So, all in all, there would be relaxation from the burden of his mind. He threw a saddle swiftly over Star's back and galloped down the lane through the last of the shower and on to the left along the dust-laid road.

The McKinstries' cottage looked sodden and unkempt as he passed. Liz was out in her bare feet, splashing through the mud, calling to her ducks and chickens, bending her ungainly body over the coops, clutching her bedraggled calico dress and petticoats with a slack hand. Old McKinstrie himself smoked his pipe in the doorway with the hounds hanging about his feet. David waved a hand to him and rode on. Funny, dirty old cuss. But somehow he liked him. He liked them all but Mag, with her little cunning, luring eyes. He couldn't stand Mag. And he hated the way she singled him out to smile at on Sundays. He went on, pondering.

The road dipped into the cup which the Whitehorn made at the carding mill. The berry bushes fringing it were washed clean of their usual dust, and in the little hollow a cool small wind seemed to blow with a strange fragrance in it. David looked up the valley. There was the neat white house of Moll Hostetter. He could see her garden with its hollyhocks along the fence. No one could know from looking at it that an evil woman lived there. But who would guess, from seeing him riding along now on Star over the pleasant country road, that he had just *denied the faith*? His cheeks were hot and his head ached as he turned down the lane to the Forsythes'.



The big white house with its long low porch seemed to smile at him in a sudden burst of sunshine. He had a glimpse of Big Bob himself puttering about in the wagon shed. He rode around the house and tied Star to the post by the back fence. There was no sign of the women-folk around. He was just as glad after all. Even a glimpse of Terese made his heart thump. He must keep clear of her until he had this other problem solved. It would be easier if the two tortures were not curiously bound up together.

He went into the wagon shed, and Big Bob looked up with a genial grin.

"Why, hello, Dave! How's the folks? Nice little shower, eh?"

"Fine," David replied laconically, sitting down on a bench. "Greasing up the wagon?"

"Yep. Seems like it's had a touch of rheumatiz lately. You know, Dave, a little grease is good for all kinds of jints; humans', beasts', and *weehickles*'."

Big Bob laughed immoderately, and David laughed, too, not so much at the words as at the man's face.

Big Bob's round ruddy countenance seemed when he laughed to explode into a million crinkles. David always found himself expecting to see each little line continued into the surrounding air as a band of light, like the picture of the sun and its rays on the old clock at home. It was overwhelming to watch Big Bob in a fit of mirth. In addition to the break-up of his face, and following it, there came deep volcanic chuckles that began in his capacious abdomen and rose through his wide, wheezy chest until he shifted his tobacco at last and allowed them to escape from his mouth in roaring *a-ha-ha's*.

When there was nothing left of the laugh but the twinkle of Big Bob's blue eyes, David voiced his errand.

"Father told me to ask you if you could spare us a good whetstone till Saturday. He'll go to town then and get



some new ones. Don't bother yourself, though, Mr. Forsythe."

Big Bob moved at once to the other end of the shed.

"Sure," he said as he fumbled in the shelves. "Sure. I got plenty. Here's a good one. Tell your dad there's no hurry about returnin' it."

Then he put a foot on the hub of the wagon wheel, pushed his hat back, and thoughtfully scratched the bald spot above his forehead. The corners of his mouth twitched suspiciously. He spat once or twice and then began.

"Whitstone! Yes, sir, I never see a whitstone that I don't think of poor old Guffey back in Indiana County, where I grewed up. Guffey he'd got along, you see, without a wife till he was fifty mebbe or thereabouts, an' then his mother died an' he sorta begun lookin' round. An' who should take his fancy but a flippertigibbet from some town that was out visitin' relatives.

"She wasn't so young, an' I s'pose she saw her chances slippin'. Anyway, she took a look at Guffey's brick house an' the big farm, an' then she took Guffey. Poor unsuspectin' fool that he was! Well, she led him a life. She was one of these women, Dave, that's a devil all but her head, an' that's a hornets' nest. She'd go off into tantrums when she couldn't get her own way. So old Guffey just give in to her.

"I got the news from their hired man. I knowed him well. He said first she raised Cain about Guffey's sleeping in his workin' shirt. He had to have some kind of regular nightgowns, long-tailed, an' *white*, mind you! She made 'em herself, an' finally Guffey give in an' wore 'em. Sort of broke his spirit, though, I guess. Joe—that was the hired man—he told me one night he met Guffey out in the hall accidental with one of these here contraptions on. Come down below his knees, mind. Guffey looked as if he'd been caught stealin' sheep, an' then he

sidled up to Joe, and says he, 'Do all married men have to wear these things?'

"'Not as I ever heard tell of,' says Joe.

"'Well,' says Guffey, 'when I get this here on I can't tell whether I'm waitin' for a coffin or a nursin' bottle,' he says. 'Matter of fact,' he says, 'I'll be as ready for one as t'other if things keep up.'

"Then Joe said he 'peared to think he'd gone too far, an' he sorta tried to wink an' says: 'But you got to humour the ladies, Joe. Got to humour 'em.' An' he went on back to the missus.

"Well, next thing she took a fit about was gettin' Guffey to eat with his fork. Seems where she'd come from they didn't eat off their knives—not even pie. Poor Guffey knuckled under again. Joe said it was awful watchin' him. Nearly lost all pleasure in his victuals, Guffey did. But he kep' on tryin' to please her.

"Then the winter come, and they was settin' round in front of the grate in the evenings; an' Guffey an' Joe just begun like they did every winter on a little quiet spittin' contest as to who'd hit the fire straightest from the furdest point. Guffey'd hitch his chair back a bit and chew awhile on his tobaccy an' then let her fly. Then Joe'd get back as fur an' do the same thing. Got to be quite a game, Joe said. Well, the Missus went clean up in smoke when she got on to it. Course they missed the grate *some* times, you know. Bound to. An' she swore she wouldn't stay in the house unless'n they'd both use *spittoons*. She got 'em in town for the two of them. Joe said the nights seemed awful long after that. But Guffey he still sort of stuck up for her. 'Tobaccy is dirty in the house, Joe,' he says.

"Well, come spring one day Guffey got out his whitestone to sharpen an axe, an' he happened to do it at the back porch. When the Missus saw him spittin' on it, she had a conniption right there. Joe seen it all. She

said it was too filthy, him rubbin' his fingers in it, too. Said he'd got to keep a little bucket of water by him when he was whettin' anything. And she run off and brought him one right there.

"Well, Joe said old Guffey just stood still, sayin' nothing, but his face got redder an' redder. An' all at once he up an' kicked that bucket clean on to the coal-house roof. An' he yelled out at her, 'Woman,' he says, 'I give in about them damned nightgowns an' all the other things, an' I even give in about the tobaccy. But when it comes to plain, honest, Godgiven spit,' says he, 'I'm spittin',' he says, 'when an' where I please, an' I'd like to see anybody this side of hell stoppin' me!'"

Big Bob went off in a roar, and David joined him.

"Yes, sir," he said when he could speak. "I always think of old Guffey when I use a whitstone."

David lolled in sheer delight on the bench and watched the older man admiringly. The swear words which would have blanched his father's cheek lolled off Big Bob's tongue so naturally that they seemed harmless. He sat now, hoping for another story, lost for the moment in a foreign and genial atmosphere.

"Been down to camp meetin' yet, Dave?" Big Bob inquired suddenly.

"No Where is it?"

"Over Lewisville way, in the Dunn woods. They're havin' a big time, I hear. Sinners fallin' over themselves to get converted. It's the place to go for that, all right. The nearest I ever come to shoutin' 'Hallelujah!' was at a camp meetin' once. And I'm a hard one to work up. I carry my religion sorta easylike as a rule if people lets me alone. But these camp meetin's——"

"Mr. Forsythe!" David was sitting up straight now, his eyes intense. "How do you get to Dunn's woods?"

Big Bob showed no surprise at his eagerness, though his gaze narrowed a trifle.

"Why, you go out the Pike till you strike the Lewisville road. Then you follow it about three miles down. You won't miss the place if you get anyways near, for there's always people comin' and goin'. Good deal of fuss about, one way or another. Thinkin' of goin' over, Dave?"

David was already on his feet.

"Why, I don't know. I might. I've never been to one. I—I think I'll be going along home now, Mr. Forsythe. Thanks for the whetstone, and we'll return it soon."

Big Bob was really concerned.

"You can't run off without comin' into the house. Naw, naw, naw. The wife has some fresh cake. Come on in, Dave, and see the folks."

"Really, I can't. I'm in a hurry. I'm sorry. I *might* go over to camp meeting to-night, and if I do I'll need to hustle with the chores."

"Would your dad favour camp meetin'?" Big Bob asked quizzically. "They're rip-snortin' Methodists, mind. Not a blue stockin' to their legs."

"Oh, he wouldn't care. He'd be satisfied—just now—to see me go—I mean he's sort of—I'm not just sure of myself—I've got to go along now."

And David fled crimson to his horse. Big Bob stood looking after him.

"So they're tryin' to put a hair shirt on that lad!" he remarked. "Goldarn their long faces, anyway! Why can't they leave the young ones alone? Now, if I had a boy like David, a *good* boy, I'd——"

The words lost themselves in a mist, and Big Bob began to whistle ostentatiously as he went back to his wagon wheel. No one in the world dreamed that his life had in it one great disappointment. He had wanted a son.

David galloped home, scarcely looking to right or left. He felt as though, in the midst of drowning, he saw a rope flung out. Instead of floundering on hopelessly in

his doubts and fears, here was a way by which he could shift the responsibility to an outside force that would act upon him and convert him whether or no. Camp meeting! Strange he had not thought of it himself. It was there that the hardest hearts were broken and softened by the waves of feeling that beat upon them. He would go. He would surrender himself utterly to the spirit of the place. It would mean rest and relief at last.

His father looked a shade surprised when he heard David's intention; but aside from the raising of his bushy brows he made no motion to deter him. There was a set look on the boy's face which Daniel respected. He told Sarah quietly in the kitchen that there should be no undue comments made by the rest of the family on David's going. So supper went on as usual. Jeannie alone was irrepressible. Towards the end of the meal she burst out:

"Oh, I wish I was going along to camp meeting. I've always wanted to go. Old McKinstrie was talking about it yesterday."

"*Mr. McKinstrie, Jeannie,*" prompted her father sternly.

"Well, *Mr. McKinstrie* was talking about it to some man in a buggy. I heard them when I was picking berries. *Mr. McKinstrie* slapped his leg and said, 'You know there are always more souls *made* than *saved* at camp meeting.' What did he mean?"

There was a frightened silence during which the older girls turned rosy and David stared at his plate. Daniel opened his mouth to speak, but Sarah was ahead of him. She looked into Jeannie's innocent eyes and said quietly: "How would any one make sense out of half *Mr. McKinstrie* says! Were the berries thick along the road?"

Conversation flowed on its usual way again.

But David, leaving the table to get at the farm chores,

tried to put Jeannie's inadvertent quotation far from him. It struck a discordant note in the feelings he was trying to assemble. Jeannie would give them all a shamed face in front of strangers some day! She was so innocent. She didn't know *anything*. He sang softly to himself as he fed and bedded the horses. Liza Jane and Betsy milking in the cow stable couldn't hear him. The old tune was Meribah.

*"So on a narrow neck of land  
'Twixt two unbounded seas to stand,  
Yet how insensible!  
A point of time, a moment's space,  
Removes me to yon heavenly place,  
Or shuts me up in hell.*

*"Be this my one great business here,  
With holy trembling, holy fear,  
To make my calling sure."*

The voices of the girls came nearer and David stopped suddenly. But the familiar words went on in his mind:

*"O God! my inmost soul convert,  
And deeply on my thoughtless heart  
Eternal things impress;  
Give me to feel their solemn weight  
And save me e'er it be too late.  
Wake me to righteousness."*

When at last, clean-shaven and Sunday-suited, he mounted Star's back and rode again down the lane, he had worked himself into a fervour of anticipation. The evening itself was beautiful. Over the far treetops to the east the full moon was rising. Long bands of gold and rose still spread across the west. There was a freshness



in the air and the whispering of invisible companionship all about; soft chirps of crickets from the moist grass by the roadside and from the long windrows of hay; strumming tree-toads in the woods, twitterings from nests, and the craving moan of the whippoorwill from the hollow of the Whitehorn.

Just as he passed the sugar meadow a thrush sent out its long, fluted call, the burden of love and of night. David sat tensely looking straight ahead. There must be now of all times no thought of Terese and those other fires that had burned him. He urged Star on. And as the road opened up before him, his soul again seemed to soar. He lifted his earnest young face to the evening wind. The bands of light across the sky became the gates of heaven. The little common things he usually thought of were as though they had never been. He was lifted up into a white unreality.

The Pike was wider and more dusty. There were no other travellers in sight. The big fields on either side were less hilly, and the woods were deeper. Dusk was falling now, and one stretch of woods seemed to yawn darkly to receive Star and her rider. There was a chilliness in it suggestive of death and despair. David gave his imagination full play. The natural healthy fear of dark and strange places, he translated into a panic of remorse and terror for sin. He thought of the Garden of Gethsemane, of Calvary. He lashed his spirit with thongs of vicarious pain. A sweat broke upon him. When he turned down the Lewisville road he knew what was happening to him. It was the thing he had been praying for. There was only needed now the great surge of appeal, of united supplication, the beating waves of the music of camp meeting to carry him over the line—to convert him.

The road, as he went on, grew more populous as Big Bob had predicted. Fed from narrow byroads and farm

lanes, it became almost congested with buggies and spring wagons and horses. Alongside walked those who could not ride. These stopped and looked curiously at all strangers or called out greetings to their more prosperous friends riding by. There was that excitement and suspense in the air which is a part of every group moving animatedly towards the same goal. David felt it; was borne along with it until at last, when the darkness made the moonlight visible, he turned into the Dunn woods.

There would have been no mistaking the place, even if there had been no accompanying procession to guide him. The old stake and rider fence that separated the woods from the road had been torn away for perhaps fifty yards. The underbrush had been cleared or beaten down by many feet. Wheel tracks and the mark of horses were everywhere apparent amongst the trees. David rode in with a fast-beating heart, rode on until he saw opening up before him the most thrilling sight that his young eyes had seen. There, in the wide clearing that a sawmill had made at one time, was a great vibrating mass of lights and people, and confused sound. At the farther end, roped off from the dark woods, was a huge ring in which the service itself was held. There was a platform of rough boards, with an improvised pulpit of store boxes. Three chairs stood behind, with three black-clad figures upon them. These were the ministers. A small table with a huge pitcher, and the ponderous Bible topping the store-box pulpit, completed the furnishings of the platform. But in the rest of the circle, on rough slab benches, sat and swayed the crowd of which David meant soon to form a part. Dozens of tin lanterns strung on wire that stretched from post to post sent down a weird yellowish light that touched up faces here and there, hard or eager, wistful or penitent.

David followed the men who were taking their horses

farther into the woods. He tied Star securely to a young tree and hurried back to the circle of light. An intoning voice was in the air. He was late! The meeting had begun. He wanted a seat well to the front. If he should feel compelled to testify to his conversion. . . . The thought which at normal times would have been cruelly abhorrent to the sensitive boy, now, in the strange elation which urged him on, seemed natural and possible.

Returning on foot, he discovered that his view of the scene was quite different from the one he had had on Star's back. He was conscious of the fringe of the circle, that before had blent with the darkness of the trees. He knew it now with certainty, because he had to pass through it. Rough men, young and old, jostling, mumbling, jeering, laughing, peering into the lighted ring but making no move to enter. Curious, coarse lookers-on, smelling of drink, offering each other tobacco, making lewd remarks about this woman and that. They seemed to combine forcibly to hold David back. But he was tall and strong. He edged about, pushing and boring his way until he could see between shoulders the platform and the three ministers in black. But just in front of him, as his last barrier, was a ring of men half supporting a huge fellow who was evidently drunk. David found himself looking fascinated at the central figure in spite of his efforts to fix his gaze beyond him. The man's head was bald except for a sprinkling of grayish hair at the back, and very red. His face was fat as a full moon, but it hung now in those sagging lines of heavy solemnity which a drunken man's occasionally acquires. His wide mouth drooped; so did his fleshy jowls. His eyes dripped tears. Now and then something between a hiccough and a sob escaped him. At what seemed regular intervals he opened his lips just enough to disclose two forlorn yellow teeth, then closed them again mournfully while his supporters guffawed. David

tried to push by, but the circle seemed always to move just in front of him as the solemn one lurched.

Suddenly over the heads of the crowd came a loud clear voice. David on tiptoe could see one of the black-clad figures at the edge of the platform, book in hand.

"Brothers and sisters in the Lord, let us lift our voices in hymn number five-seventy-eight. Number five hundred and seventy-eight:

*My soul be on thy guard,  
Ten thousand foes arise!"*

The drunken man sighed and shook his head dubiously, the lonely teeth fretting against his lips.

"That's a hell of a lot of foes," he said slowly and heavily, but with surprising distinctness.

David felt an involuntary twitching of his mouth muscles, but he pulled himself together sharply.

The minister on the platform was raising his right arm.

"Number five hundred and seventy-eight, to the tune of Laban."

Then in a shrill, unrelenting tenor he raised the first note.

David knew in a second what was about to happen. He had raised that tune himself too often at family worship not to be familiar with its tonic pitfalls. He listened half fearful, half amused, while the congregation strained after their leader in the first line.

"My soul be on thy guard," rose and fell with an effort. But when the minister's piercing tenor essayed the next note, there was a queer medley of breaking voices. The words "ten thousand" seemed to labour piercingly for existence in sound, for a moment, and then died stillborn in a cracked silence.

The minister stopped and wiped his forehead. There was an embarrassed hush. Then into it was hurled a

voice, raucous and yet resonant. It came from the drunken man, who had suddenly reared himself up to his full height, and was looking anxiously towards the platform.

"Hi, Parson!" he yelled. "Better start that at *five* thousand!"

There was a second's stillness while every one seemed to catch breath and the import of the remark together, and then over the rollicking crowd in the outskirts there swept a roar of laughter, a devastating wave of ribald mirth. It swept David with it. The circle of light, the three men on the platform, the faces on the benches were all blotted out. The reaction from his long stress had come. David was beside himself with merriment, with a sudden reckless sense of comradeship with the mob. He slapped the drunken man's back, he leaned on the shoulder of the man beside him, weak from his paroxysm. He had no longer the slightest desire to go to camp meeting. He wanted to forget it. He wanted to drink deep of the rough hilarity about him, until all his flesh tingled with life and the curious disturbing element which was his soul was drowned completely in the process. Drink! That was the thing! Some one on the edge of the crowd would have it. He would get drunk. He would tumble and reel about and jest with the rest of them.

He moved back towards the outskirts, giving one and another of the men he passed a waggish dig in the ribs. Whenever a ribald remark reached his ears he yelled with laughter, while he kept his eye alert for an open flask.

Suddenly he saw, through the thinning outer group, a face that now stood out from the shadows of the woods, and now melted into them. It was the face of a woman, smiling, somehow seeing him through the crowd. David knew then what it was he wanted. It was not drink. It was fire in his body, and yet he gloated in the burning.



The face drew him on. Without conscious thought he fled towards it while it seemed always to be retreating farther into the fringe of trees.

But at last he was near. Then he felt rather than saw the bright brown eyes, the curly, blowy hair, the red cheeks of Moll Hostetter. Her slow, husky voice came to his ears, very low.

"If it ain't David!" she murmured, and had him in her embrace. The soft rise and fall of her breasts were close to his heart. He could smell a scent on her coarse clothes. And thundering through him was a mad pulse of curiosity, of anticipation, of determination to end the torment which rent him.

"If it ain't David!" Moll's slow voice was whispering huskily again. "I often wondered why you never stopped in now since you're man grown. So you had to come to camp meetin' to find me, eh? You're awful good-lookin', David. I been waitin' on you comin' for a long time now."

With that she kissed him with heavy, moist lips.

David knew then that he must fight. Every bare, parched nerve of him was pulling him down to the cool earth and the satisfaction of Moll's flesh. But a whiter flame rose in him than the old fire. His body was clean and sound, and this woman would defile it. He began to struggle while her arms grew tighter.

"Let me go, you!" David cried. "Let me go, Moll. I didn't mean—I didn't come for what you think. *Let me go!*"

But Moll held.

"Aw, listen, Davy! What you makin' all the fuss for? Mind, I've been hopin' you'd come sometime. Say, I don't want money. I *like* you, Dave. Aw, now——"

David used his strength. His teeth were set tight. Moll was a big woman and strong, but her arms were no match for his.



"Let me go, let me go, I tell you!" David hissed. "I've nothing to do with the likes of *you!* *Get away!*"

He was free. He ran panting through the woods, his forehead beaded with sweat, his legs trembling. He loosed Star with shaking hands, bestrode her, and in a moment was out on the road again.

The moon looked larger now, and redder, moving slowly along the south. The road lay white between its black edging shadows. David leaned low over Star's neck and slapped her flank. In a moment they were flying through the pale night, the colt's ears erect with the joy of the gallop, the boy pressed close against her, broken with lone, whimpering breaths which he could not restrain.

The ignominy of a return like this after all the holy hopes of his going! He remembered his thoughts on the way and the hymn he had sung as he fed the horses. He remembered it all with a sick shame. He had been so confident, so uplifted, so *trusting* that God would open the very gates of heaven to him. And instead he had been cast down to hell. All that he had been through at the camp-meeting grounds seemed like a nightmare of evil. While others were being converted, he was finding only sin. He was hopeless, then. His head sank lower. Star galloped on, her slim ears pricking the air, her nostrils wide, her small hoofs falling with faint sound on the soft dust. So they passed out of the Lewisville road and on along the Pike.

It was after they had gone through the deep woods that David raised his head, sat up straight, and looked about him. Something within had impelled him. He was answering a voice. Star had slowed suddenly to a walk, as if she too felt a spell. The moon had passed behind a cloud.

It was the night, David slowly knew, that had called to him. He had never been so conscious of it before. The

wide, encompassing darkness that flowed all about him and yet left him solitary in the midst of it. The unfathomable lapping waves of shadows that shut away from him every other human soul yet left his own untouched. The night. Wide and deep and resistless as eternity. Soft and healing with the hush of God in it. David felt all this worldlessly even as he felt the fields breathing out the perfume of harvest in their sleep.

But he felt something more. For the first time in his life he felt himself. Here, the heart and centre of all the mystery of the night was *he, David!* Watching, knowing, feeling. No one between him and the great sweep of the sky. No one between him and—God. For he felt God, too. *Something* was there, behind the rolling moon and the stars with their crowns of fire! Something, *Some One!* The reality of the night. The Spirit that seemed now gently to touch his. David's throat tightened with the awe and ecstasy of his discovery. For the first time in his life he looked up, unafraid. Simply, worshipfully, he accepted the new Divinity as by some inward miracle he suddenly accepted himself, on new terms. For all in a moment he felt within him a worthiness, something true, of which he need not be ashamed in the midst of the solitude and dignity of the darkness.

He turned at last down the lane. The house stood out starkly in the moonlight. A small heaviness stole upon David as he scanned it. But as he rode past the low eaves where Jeannie slept, he smiled.

He put Star in her stall and made her comfortable for the night with quick skilful motions in the dark. He took one last long look at the sky and then entered by the kitchen door and, removing his thick shoes, crawled softly up the back stairs.

Out side his own door in the narrow hall he stopped suddenly. He could hear the heavy stertorous breathing he knew to be his father's coming from the adjoining

room. But he heard something else: low troubled mutterings that rose to words. It was Mother, talking in her sleep.

David slipped quickly through his own door, flushed as though eavesdropping. But there was only a white line about his straight young mouth as he sat down on his straw tick and folded his arms, with an oddly mature gesture. He had been through much that evening, yet nothing had so stirred him emotionally as that half-incoherent pleading cry of his mother. There was something he must think of now. It was of the greatest immediacy. One quiet closed door of his life was swung open. Hitherto, his father and mother had been to him stable parts of the environing routine of his existence, fixed familiar figures which moved with unvarying precision in and out of his days with as little colour of change as the old farmhouse, or the hills behind it. They were Father and Mother. Behind those words he had never thought to penetrate.

But now, suddenly, out of the low, troubled outcry of a dream there stood before him two strange persons. Daniel and Sarah McDowell. Two people between whom were the secrets of life: good and evil, joy and sorrow, anger and love. The same fires he had felt in his own body burned in his father's.

His mother to-morrow morning would busy herself about the stove, setting the table, pouring the coffee. And beneath her dark calico dress would be soft seductive flesh that had sometime winced and cried out for mercy in the night time. *Mother!*

Mother, sitting at family worship, her hands quietly folded, her grey eyes looking far out of the window, while Father was reading the chapter, would know secrets that she would never tell.

Father and Mother! They were like that. They were persons. They were Daniel and Sarah. Even as they sat in

church, so straight, so still, watching Dr. McFeeters—even then he would know that their hearts held mysteries even as his own did.

He remembered the look on his mother's face as she walked past the little graves in the churchyard on Sundays. He remembered the day he had come in from the harvest field and overheard her and Grandmother talking in low voices in the kitchen.

"It was carrying the water for the washing—I told Daniel, but he somehow didn't see why—I'd been so strong always—but that time it was too much—and the baby was stillborn. It was the worst labour I've ever had.

"And then after that—it was only two months till—till I knew it had happened again. I was so weak—I wanted to die—I don't know how I got through my time. And that baby only lived a day. It was so puny it had no chance. I've never felt the same to Daniel since. Maybe I'm wicked. Daniel's a good man——"

And then Grandmother's decisive voice edged with a terrible bitterness:

"Aye, he's a good man. But there's many a good man will have plenty to answer for in the Judgment day that will surprise him."

It had all been incomprehensible women's talk to David that day, but something had stamped the words on his mind. They came back now. And he understood them.

A great wave of tenderness for his mother rose and choked him. Life had been hard for her. He had never thought—never dreamed that it could be so ; that her heart held buried bitterness. And Father? David sat tense. Even as he had that night ceased to fear God, he knew now that he no longer feared his father. This suddenly revealed weakness in the older man's righteous armour made him seem to the boy an intimate human being, one with whom he could speak now with casual ease. He could picture the two of them salting the sheep,

putting up the hay, mending the harness in the shed, talking about the news in the paper or the doings of the neighbourhood. He would not be afraid now to offer his own opinions, to discuss the many subjects he had till now pondered over in silence. The old constraint was gone.

But Mother! His face burned again. Sweet mother, thinking all her secret thoughts were hidden deep. He would be self-conscious now with her. He would find it hard to meet her calm grey eyes. She would be so much more than *Mother* to him now. She would be a woman also.

## CHAPTER IV

THE WET JULY MERGED AT LAST INTO A HOT AUGUST. The locusts and tree-toads, silent during the long weeks of rain, strummed and droned without ceasing now in the dusty heat. The lush grass of the meadow slowly turned brown and the Whitehorn dwindled to a mere ribbon of water. The cows, instead of standing knee-deep in the cool stream, now trod heavily through the band of bordering mud in search of coolness.

Daniel and David stopped work at half-past eleven when Sarah rang the big dinner bell which hung in its weathered framework, near the back porch. They did not go back to the fields until after two, but they worked again from sundown to dusk to make up for this respite. Each day at ten o'clock and four, Jeannie carried them buttermilk from the cool spring house or vinegar sling which Sarah made up in the kitchen, along with fresh rhubarb leaves to put in the crowns of their straw hats. It was an old habit to guard thus against a sunstroke, and the men received them gratefully.

Between the heavy duties of the washing and ironing, the churning and the baking, the girls picked berries assiduously up and down the fence rows, coming home some days pellmell and a little pale if they had seen a snake. Liza Jane especially had to fight her constant dread of them, even of the blacksnakes which were supposed to be useful on a farm. But Big Bob Forsythe had once killed a copperhead, and old McKinstrie was always reporting—with more or less accuracy—the presence of rattlers on the stony hill behind his house.

Sarah worried over the jam and the jelly. It was a question of how much sugar they could afford to use up.



But her housewifely soul won out in the struggle, and there was a decent array of filled glasses behind the doors of the sitting-room cupboard on the shelf above Daniel's books.

In the afternoon she and the older girls carefully laid the best sunbonnet pattern on the new calico, shifting it this way and that, and consulting together seriously as to which way the most economical cutting could be effected. Then, having their sewing prepared at last, they sat on the back porch to rest for an hour between weightier tasks, and stitched small, meticulous stitches. Sarah was one of the prize quilters of the community, and Liza Jane was not far behind her; so the brim of each sunbonnet, made of the double of the material and interlined, was ornamented by intricate "feathers" in needlework. Sometimes, if they got seated at their sewing before two o'clock, Daniel read aloud from the *New York "Try-bune,"* which was one of his few extravagances.

"Another murder, atrocious in itself and alarming in its suggestions, disgraced the city Saturday night. A party of Germans, quietly seated in a saloon, were intruded upon by a number of ruffians crazed with drink, who not content with refusing to pay for liquor they had ordered and drunk, invaded the private portions of the house, and heaped upon women the most infamous epithets. Cajoled rather than forced from the house, they assaulted it from the street with a shower of stones and one of the missiles struck and killed an inmate as he was closing the door against the rioters. The young desperadoes—the *oldest not twenty*—had roamed for hours unchecked through the streets and dispersed unmolested, after ending the orgies of the night with this foul murder, although it appears that three of them have since been arrested. Comment upon such facts can hardly be necessary. All men can see that this crime means something more vital than the wanton killing of a peaceful citizen. Coupling it with the other affairs which have been so numerous since Tammany

tore down the sluice-gates that checked the flood of rum and ruin, this murder means the swift oncoming of uncontrollable lawlessness."

Daniel, deeply moved, took off his glasses and wiped them. He glanced towards David.

"If only those wicked young men could have been brought to realise that 'no drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of God'!"

"What's the nation coming to, if crimes like that are done in the cities, openhanded!" Sarah ejaculated.

Daniel sighed heavily and read on:

"Here's the latest word on the Indians:

"Friend Paturn reports the opinion of the leading chiefs among the Comanches is that the Kiowas, Cheyennes, Apaches, and some of the Comanches have combined to live for a time on the plains and commit raids along the frontier, especially in Texas, but that they do not intend to enter upon a general Indian war."

"Oo-aye," shivered Sarah. "Thank God we haven't to fend against the savages here the way Mother did in her time. Read something more cheerful, Daniel. I can't thole the thought of Indians."

"Well, here you are," Daniel suddenly chuckled. "Listen, girls. Here's an item for you:

"Lately the ladies were recommended not to wear jute switches as a head-dress for the reason that they contained *insects*. It now turns out that the story was a hoax, and the great knobs over the cerebellum will now be worn, we fear, larger than ever. Nowadays it seems to be the rule to make a hollow where there should be a hillock, and to raise a mountain where there should be a valley. We give it up!"

Jeannie's giggle broke out first.

"Why, that's just like me with my false bust," she cried.

Even David's shoulders shook in the general laughter, though he kept his eyes on the fields.

But Daniel's face clouded again as he turned a page.

"Here," he said, "is something in line with my own views about secular reading. Some minister, a Rev. Mr. Orr, has this to say about the novel writer, Mr. Charles Dickens:

"The regenerate soul would loathe such garbage. I pass no sentence on this foolish creature who will have to appear before his Judge and Maker, but I feel and am grieved for the people who can enjoy such company and such trash."

"Those are strong words, but I believe they're justified. I hope none of my children will ever contaminate their minds with *worldly* reading. . . . Well, well! Listen to this:

"The following startling piece of intelligence appeared in the Legal Gazette for July 8. 'The Commencement Exercises of the University of Chicago took place on Thursday, June 30. Among those upon whom degrees were conferred was Mrs. Ada A. Kepley, a woman!'"

"A *woman*?" Sarah echoed. "Why, for pity's sake!"

"A woman!" Liza Jane cried. "Why, you'd think she could never face being the only one among all the men!"

"A woman," Betsy mused. "I wonder what she would want a degree for!"

But Daniel was looking over his glasses as indicating that he was ready to read further.

"There is an advertisement here that interests me greatly. It is entitled, 'Build up the System.'

"Strength evaporates fast at this season. This is especially the case with all who live by the sweat of their brow. From

every pore of the sieve-like skin, a moisture exudes which contains the elements of vitality. Thereby the blood is impoverished, the nerves relaxed, the muscles weakened, the animal spirits depressed. The constant drain that produces these effects cannot be arrested because it is due to the heat of the atmosphere. But the loss of the life sustaining elements can be supplied by extra invigoration. Now therefore, is the time to resort to Hostetter's Stomach Bitters. Of the 40 millions of people in the U.S. probably one-fifth have tested the restorative properties of Hostetter's Bitters. That any of these should be persuaded to experiment with worthless nostrums recommended by unscrupulous and ignorant empirics, seems almost incredible."

"Cut out that piece, Sarah, and keep it. Mebbe by next summer we can get a bottle."

Daniel folded the paper carefully and laid it on the old dough-tray that stood on the porch holding the pail of spring water with its tin cup beside it, and a pan of early apples.

He put his glasses carefully on top of the paper.

"Well, David, we must be getting back to work. I see," he added as he got up stiffly, "that they're still having trouble on the other side with Napoleon. Well, among them be it!"

Sarah and the girls went on discussing the items of news for a few minutes after the men had gone, but they drifted soon to local gossip and the number of "feathers" that could best be stitched in the sunbonnet brims.

As the weeks passed the ban upon friendship with the bound girl was lifted somewhat. Each Sabbath at church she sat decorously beside Mrs. Forsythe, her black eyes fixed on old Dr. McFeeters with a sort of fascinated wonder. At intermission she watched carefully the behaviour of the other young girls and copied it eagerly. Even Daniel, as he looked at her with drawn brows, could see nothing in her conduct worthy of censure.

It was Jeannie especially whom Terese studied as her model. The two girls were the same age, and from the moment they met took a strong liking for each other. From Sabbath to Sabbath, as Daniel did not interfere, they passed more time together, sauntering through the churchyard, going to the spring, strolling down the locust-bordered road past Dr. McFeeter's long, white house with the bee boxes along the fence, and then hurrying up the knoll again as intermission ended. Their conversations on these little rambles were highly diversified.

"I'm learnin' the catechism, Jeannie. I'm to join the church mebbe next winter. And I'm learnin' to quilt! You ought to see. Mother Forsythe's got a 'Rag-wheel of Destruction' in the frames, and we stitch on it every afternoon when the work's done. Can you quilt, Jeannie?"

"Just middling. I know how, but I hate to sit still so long. I slip out to the fields sometimes when the girls are quilting. Mother says I'm *like* the Irishman's flea—always somewhere else when you go to catch me."

"There was an Irishman with the show for a while. He juggled. He was a Catholic and he used to let me look at his Rosary and Crucifix. It was pretty, all gold and——"

A violent pressure on her arm made her look up. Jeannie's face was aghast.

"Oh, *Terese!* Don't ever, *ever* tell anybody else you had anything to do with a *Catholic*. Why, they're—they're——"

Words failed her. The two girls looked panic-stricken into each other's eyes.

"Are they as bad as that?" Terese whispered.

"Oh, they're *terrible!* They worship the Pope and the Virgin Mary, and they have images and crosses and things. And they'll all be *lost!*"

"You mean they'll go to—to hell?"

"Yes."

They walked on in silence. Then Terese looked at her new friend.

"You won't tell anybody I knowed a Catholic once, will you, Jeannie?"

"Never," Jeannie promised solemnly.

They turned back towards the church.

"Jeannie?"

"Yes."

"Do you like any boy so much it sort of—oh, I don't know—just makes you ache all over?"

Jeannie giggled guilelessly.

"How could liking anybody make you ache? No, I don't like the boys much, excepting David. What made you ask that?"

"Oh, I knowed a girl once who felt like that," Terese said softly with her face turned away.

Sometime during their walks they usually ran into David, who showed great surprise at meeting them, and then fell into awkward step with them and sauntered silently beside them. For several weeks now he had not been forced to dodge Mag McKinstrie, for she hadn't been at church. He looked at Terese only with hasty glances, then became preoccupied immediately with the view over the distant hills. Jeannie chatted on at such times, inwardly concerned over the fact that David and Terese did not seem to take to each other as they should.

When she told her brother later in great confidence that he should be nicer to Terese, she was frightened at the effect upon him. His face turned scarlet, and he answered nothing whatever.

"Oh, you ain't mad at me, Davy, are you?" she pleaded.

"Course I'm not mad." But to this he added nothing, and Jeannie was distressed that she had spoken.

The truth was, David was in love, and even a sight of the bound girl intoxicated him so that his tongue and even his limbs refused to react in normal fashion. He had met



her again more than once, in the sugar meadow. Each time it was dusk with a streak of sunset still showing through the trees. She had not danced again, and he had not asked though he longed to do so. They sat on a fallen log, David's arm about her, feeling the delicious nearness of each other. Their words were negligible. David could never recall afterwards much of what they said. But their kisses burned hot in his heart. Once Terese had spoken after a long silence.

"I'm bound out till I'm twenty-one," she said. "But the Forsythes are so good to me they'd let me free sooner if I—if we——"

The sentence ended haltingly, and David felt a new grip of reality. He was startled at the unspoken thought in her mind. For himself, he had never considered beyond the strange rapture of the present. He did not want to look into the future.

The drought continued, as August died towards September. The weeds by the roadside were heavy with dust. There was a brown cast upon the leaves of the locust-trees along the lane. Only the goldenrod seemed to thrive as it ran its bright circle of the countryside. The crickets continued their threnody of the summer.

On the first day of September old McKinstrie with two hounds at his heels appeared suddenly at the back door just as Daniel and David were ready to start for the fields after dinner. His lean shoulders sagged, and for once his placid rumination upon a quid of tobacco was lacking. The old man looked haggard.

Sarah greeted him kindly.

"Well, Mr. McKinstrie, and how are you all to-day? Have a chair here on the porch."

But he waved it aside.

"I want to speak to you an' Mr. McDowell private," he said hoarsely.

Daniel looked faintly amused.

"You may go on out to the field, David. I'll follow you directly. Girls, are you off for the spring house? Well, now, Mr. McKinstrie, step into the kitchen."

They could hear David's whistle and the girl's light laughter as they came in.

The old man looked from one to the other, and swallowed hard.

"I hate to say what I'm a-goin' to, but I hain't no choice. My girl Mag's in trouble, an', by God, she puts it on your David!"

"No!" It was such a cry of pain from Sarah as had not escaped her lips since her last night of travail. Daniel's ruddy face had drained white. He grasped the chair beside him for support.

"McKinstrie," he said at last, for once omitting the *Mr.*, "tell me all you know of this from start to finish."

The old man wiped his mouth nervously with the back of his hand.

"Well it's jist like this. Back in the spring Mag she took to havin' faintin' fits. Then come 'bout two months when she didn't take to her food. Jist acted scunnered at everything. Even then I never thought of nothin' wrong. But this last month I got suspicious. So, I put the question to her plain yestidy, an' she owned up. An' she says it's David, an' I can mind now most every Sabbath day I'd seen them together *somewhere* time of intermission. An' all I say is my Mag's as good as any girl if he'll marry her. But of course if you'd rather settle——"

Sarah sank down on the chair behind her, a deadly faintness creeping over her. Even Mary Ann's piteous death, and the shock of Abram's running away, had not been like this new pain. There was shame here and bitter disgrace.

Old McKinstrie was speaking again. A faint gleam of shrewdness shone in his eye.

"We ain't been in to the Squire's yet. Course we can't get nowhere till Mag swears. I guess we'll go in this afternoon. An' you can be talkin' to David. Course Mag, she's set on his marryin' her, but, as I say, if you'd rather settle——"

Daniel McDowell had rarely pleaded with any one in his life. But he pleaded now with stiff lips.

"Mr. McKinstrie, don't go to the Squire's to-day. Give us a chance to talk to David. There must be a great mistake here. Won't you promise to say nothing to any one for a day or so, until we see—until we talk it over——"

But the gleam of shrewdness in the old man's eyes had grown more pronounced.

"Naw, I think we'll go on to-day. That's the place to start with these here affairs—at the Squire's. Course David, now, will be denyin' it. They al'ays do. An' then where does Mag come in? I gotta look out for her. Naw, we'll be goin' in to the Squire's to-day. I jist stopped now to give you wind of it, bein' as you're such close neighbours an' all. I do be sorry about the whole business, but I gotta look out for Mag. An' I bear ye no ill will, mind, nor David either. Young uns will be young uns. Well, I must be gettin' along."

Neither Daniel nor Sarah spoke as he left the kitchen and moved off down the lane to the accompaniment of the yapping hounds. They simply faced each other, stunned in their misery. Then Sarah said with blue lips:

"Daniel, you don't think it's *true*?"

Daniel shook his head.

"I don't know. I'll talk to David at once. He's an honest lad. I think he'll tell the truth. But suppose he *is* innocent. What chance has he against a girl's oath? Oh, we're stricken sore by this blow."

Sarah came close, looking up into his face with tragic eyes.

"I've noticed on the Sabbath they were sometimes

together. David always seemed angry and embarrassed and hurrying to get away. I think Mag's been setting a trap for him. Oh, Daniel, it's not David's fault, no matter what comes. Don't be hard with him."

Daniel did not answer. He had seen something with his own eyes, the evidence of which now stabbed him. He had seen David enter the sugar meadow in the early dusk, and emerge an hour later from its leafy shadows.

He left the kitchen now without more words and made his way slowly across the fields to where David was ploughing for the new planting of wheat. The boy had seemed different lately—more free with him, and happier betimes, though he still had his heavy moods. He had said nothing more about joining the church though the fall communion was only two months away. Now, he was not only out of the fold of God but disgraced, and perhaps guilty of a great sin. Daniel's step lagged heavily. He felt like an old man, bearing the weight of the world.

He made a sign to David, and the boy stopped the horses and waited until his father came up to him.

For once Daniel's self-possession forsook him utterly. He could find no words.

"Go on to the end of the furrow," he said at last, "and let the horses rest for a minute. I want to speak with you."

When they were together under the big cherry tree that shaded the corner of the field, Daniel moistened his lips and began.

"David, Mr. McKinstrie brought us the worst news we've ever had."

He stopped, eying his son keenly. But David's blue eyes gave back only astonishment.

"Bad news for *us*?"

"Yes. And I'm going to trust you as I would trust myself to tell me the plain truth."

David's face suddenly went scarlet. Old McKinstrie then had seen him in the woods with Terese, and reported it.

His father saw the flush, and his lips trembled.

"David, Mag McKinstrie's in trouble, and she places the responsibility on you."

For a second David stood speechless while his father's heart stopped beating. Then the boy's eyes flamed with a look of honest indignation.

"Me?" he cried. "*Me!* Why, the vile little devil! I wouldn't touch her with a dirty stick, and she knows it. So this is why she's been runnin' after me, and I've had to be always gettin' out of her way. Jeannie can tell you she's been botherin' me on Sabbath. Why, Father, you and Mother didn't believe—you couldn't think *that* of me!"

And when Daniel looked into the clear eyes raised squarely to his, he held out his hand to his son. David put his into it with a feeling that at last he could talk to his father as man to man.

"Thank God," said Daniel, and then sank down on the grass under the tree.

David's quick question brought him back to the trouble yet remaining, as the boy dropped down beside him.

"But how can I *prove* I'm innocent?" he asked.

Daniel shook his head heavily.

"That's the trouble. They're taking Mag to the Squire's to-day for her to swear to it."

"And a lie won't faze Mag," David put in bitterly.

"A man's helpless against a girl's oath, be he never so innocent. I doubt we'll have to face the worst, David."

"What will it mean?"

"Money, or—or jail."

"I'll go to jail, first," David said hotly. "We've no money to give them now of all years. And besides, if we pay, everybody'll think I'm—I'm guilty!"

"I know," Daniel agreed heavily. "If it were myself and I was alone in the world I would go to jail rather than settle. But we have to think of Mother and the girls. Women would never forget a disgrace like that. And you're too young anyhow, David. No, I've decided in my own mind. If we hear any word from the Squire, we'll pay quietly, and trust that God will make the truth prevail sooner or later."

"Father," David burst out, the sweat standing in great drops on his forehead, "I've got to go away! I've been thinking of it anyhow. Now, if this news gets around, I can't stand it to face people. Half of them will think it's all true. I—I had sort of hoped if the wheat crop was good I could mebbe go to the Academy this fall——"

It was out. The desire of his heart, when he had least meant to reveal it.

"Eldersridge?" Daniel echoed. "You feel you'd take to college, David?"

"Yes, sir. I don't care for the farming, and books always come easy to me. I'd like after college to read law."

He knew the pang that went through his father's heart at the words. If he could only have said he longed to enter the ministry. . . .

"Of course," David went on hesitantly, "I know the Academy would be out of the question this fall, with the crop ruined, now—this! But I've got to go away somewhere."

Daniel sat silent, and then his voice came as though from the deeps, "I'll go in and talk to Colonel Galloway. I think I'll—mortgage."

"No!" David was surprised at his own temerity in taking issue strongly with his father. "No, Father, don't do that. You might never get out from under it. We'll surely think of some other way."

Then the boy's face grew tense.

"I could sell Star," he said slowly.



His father's hand fell on his shoulder in the only caress remembered between them.

"We couldn't accept that sacrifice, my son."

"If I go away, I wouldn't be using her anyhow."

They fell silent. Then David moved towards the plough horses that were eating grass noisily at the field's edge, the plough chains clanking behind them.

Daniel followed, a new shadow across his face.

"There's one thing more, David. I believe your innocence. But I have twice seen you go into the sugar meadow of an evening, and I've wondered."

The flush came back to David's cheeks. He tossed the loose earth about with the toe of his heavy shoe.

"I thought that was what old McKinstrie had been telling you," he said very low. "I've done nothing wrong. I've just gone there sometimes to meet Terese."

"*Terese?*" Daniel almost shouted the word. "You don't mean Forsythe's *bound girl?*"

"Yes, sir." David did not meet his father's eyes this time. He looked at the ground.

Daniel's shoulders sagged as though they could support no further blow.

"You're fond of this girl?" he asked quietly at last.

"Yes, sir." David half turned, looking away in the opposite direction.

After a long silence Daniel said decisively: "We'll manage some way about the Academy. It was always my ambition for you to get an education. Your mother has a bit of money your grandmother left her. She might cover the expense at Eldersridge this year. Maybe we can make ends meet without mortgaging. But we'll plan on the Academy in any case."

He turned and went back to the house, with more to tell Sarah than he had dreamed. Through the hot hours of the afternoon they readjusted their lives.

"I'm sure he's innocent," Daniel repeated over and over.

"I knew it before you asked him," Sarah would aver quietly.

But the disgrace remained. The smear of a scandal for the first time was upon their name. There would be whispering together through the countryside and in New Salem. David's fresh young boyhood would never be wholly clean again in the minds of the community, unless Mag would tell the truth, which was unlikely. They knew this, and their hearts were heavy. The anxiety over the complication of the bound girl disturbed Daniel more than Sarah. But she too agreed that for every reason David must leave home. They planned new economies. They considered the ten-dollar gold pieces that lay upstairs in a small tin box hidden in a bureau drawer. These represented the savings of a lifetime which Sarah's mother had given her before her death. No one knew as well as Sarah what infinite patience and fortitude had been put into those gold pieces. There were tears and prayers and life blood in them.

"I always meant to divide them among the children," Sarah said, distressed. "To use them all now for David's schooling seems wrong, and yet——"

"It will break his heart too to sell Star, and yet——"

"How can we tell the girls, especially Jeannie? And yet they'll have to know."

The hard exigency of the present coerced them at every turn. When they rose at last from their wrestling with the incredible new pain, each knew the other had grown old.

Sarah told the girls quietly in the kitchen while they were preparing supper. Liza Jane went white and Betsy screamed, while Jeannie, only half understanding, burst into tears. She knew David was in trouble, and that was enough for her.

"David is innocent," Sarah said with what calmness she could command; "and we'll all try to act in front of him

as though nothing had happened, pray God to bring the truth to light."

"But how can we hold up our heads, and everybody talking about it?" Betsy moaned.

"I'll bet I know the guilty man," Liza Jane said suddenly, her voice sharper than usual. "It might just likely be that silly Gus that worked for the Hendersons. They had to send him off because he got soft on Matilda. I mind now to see him hanging round at the McKinstries' more than once when I've been riding past."

"Where is he now?" Sarah asked quickly, a gleam of hope in her eyes.

"They don't know. They told him to leave, and he said he was going out West. You see, if it *was* him, Mag's left in the lurch; and I know she likes David, so she just put it on him. The little slut! But we'll fight it, won't we, Mother?"

Sarah looked grave.

"It's a hard thing to fight over a girl's oath. But we'll see what comes. Dry your tears, girls, and try to act natural. I hear the men coming."

Daniel did not go back to the fields that evening. But David went, glad to be out of the house, and Jeannie followed him later. Her heart was feeling its first real distress, but her mind was puzzled. Jeannie at eighteen had curiously escaped the knowledge of life's realities. She came upon David now as he leaned against the stake-and-rider fence, having just put the horses away for the night.

"Davy!" she said softly.

He turned and, as always, smiled at her.

She climbed on the fence beside him.

"Davy, I—I'm sorry about the trouble." Tears were near the surface.

"Don't worry, Jeannie. Things'll come out all right."

Jeannie laid a hand on his arm.

"Davy," she said solemnly, "if I even saw you *kill* somebody I wouldn't believe you did it."

David laughed. It was the first relief from the tension that gripped him.

"I can always bank on you, Jeannie," he said, then added, "I'll miss you a lot when I go away."

"*Away?* Oh, David, you ain't running off?"

"No, but if we can get the money together I'm going to Eldersridge in the fall. My, but I want to go, Jeannie! I want to study and *be* somebody. I'll make you all proud of me. I'm going to be a lawyer."

Jeannie was carried away momentarily by his eagerness.

"Mebbe you'll be President sometime, Davy! They'd never get a smarter one!" Then, recalling the separation, she wilted visibly. "It'll be awful for me without you, Davy. If I could just go along and be near you! Will you write to me? I never got a letter just to myself."

"'Course I will. And you can write to me. And I'll come home sometimes." He hesitated. "When you write you can tell me all the news, what you girls are all doing and—and Terese."

"Then you *do* like her, Davy," Jeannie cried triumphantly.

"Yes, I like her," he said quietly.

That night at family prayers, Daniel did a strange thing. It happened only once before in the memory of the family. The night Mary Ann had died, he had not read the chapter which, according to the methodical course of the year's reading, was due. He had leafed through to Second Corinthians and read in a voice that shook betimes and yet grew strangely strong:

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. . . ."

Now, this evening he did not open the Bible where the mark was in Ezra. He turned instead to the Psalms. By no surer means could he have emphasised the fact that a great crisis in the family's life lay upon them. They held their breath, listening, with no sound in the room but the light turning of the leaves. Then Daniel stopped and spread out the page with his large, knotted hand. When the words came, something of confidence and comfort fell upon them all, even upon David's turbulent, young soul.

"Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.

"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God. . . ."

Daniel paused before the last verses. His own eyes were shining steadily. David had raised his head, for once listening intently.

"Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.

"Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.

"And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."

All her life long Jeannie was never to hear the ninetyeth Psalm without remembering that night.

The next afternoon two things happened. As soon as dinner was over, Daniel sat down by the sitting-room table, pushed back the chenille cover, drew towards him the ink bottle, pen, a sheet of legal cap paper he had taken from the cupboard, and wrote in his thin incisive script a letter to Dr. Donaldson of the Academy.

He had first met Pater Donaldson—as his students called

him—thirty-odd years ago, when he had come to be the Presbyterian minister of the country church of Eldersridge in Indiana County. He was then a young man of fine presence, and attractive bearing and in addition to this, a born scholar. Among his people he soon found two or three farmers' sons who had learned all they could in the little country schoolhouse, and wished for more. He proposed to them that they should come to him one or two evenings a week; he would then start them in Latin and higher mathematics.

In a few years, instead of the original two or three there were a dozen, and the little room in the parsonage had grown too small. With his own hands and the help of the boys, he thereupon built a small schoolroom on the hill above his house. More young men began to come, finding board and lodging among the farmers of the community.

Now, there was a large building beside the small one atop the hill, the students numbered a hundred and needed several trained men as additional teachers, and the fame of the Academy had spread so widely that the mere recommendation of Pater Donaldson was sufficient to admit a student to any college without examination.

Indeed, though Daniel did not know it, as he wrote his letter, the farm boys from Eldersridge Academy on a Pennsylvania hill were destined to be among the ministers, lawyers, captains of industry, judges, and senators who thirty years later held the fortunes of the country in their hands.

Daniel had just sealed the letter and set it carefully upon the kitchen shelf to await the first trip to the post office, when Sarah came in from her work on the back porch, her face pale.

"It's the Squire," she said tensely. "He's coming up the lane."



Daniel's face grew graver, though he tried to accept the news casually.

"Well, well, it's what we expected. I'll go and meet him."

Squire Sloane was already off his horse. He was an agile old gentleman with gray side-burns and a pair of keen eyes that could catch a joke as quickly as a legal error in a deed. He was inclined towards the un-Calvinistic belief that, in spite of their frailties, the sons of men were a rather good sort. He met Daniel now cheerfully, and began a spirited comment upon the weather. They walked over towards the barnyard fence, and the Squire placed a foot comfortably upon the lower rail. Finally he looked sidewise at Daniel and came to the point.

"Have a little bad news for you, Mr. McDowell. Old McKinstrie brought his daughter Mag into the office yesterday——"

"Yes, yes," Daniel put in crisply. "He was here first."

"Oh, so you know the facts. Well, now, it's a bad business, but it's not anything to blight a boy's life if you just don't take it too serious——"

"Squire," Daniel said heatedly, "David is absolutely innocent of the charge."

The Squire squinted off quizzically across the fields. His expression implied that this was not the first time he had heard a boy's father make that remark in like circumstances.

"The question is, What's the best thing for us to do about it? We have no way to prove his innocence." Daniel's tone showed the strain he was under.

The Squire looked at him, keenly yet kindly.

"The best way in a case like this is to pay the money quiet-like and forget it."

"How much do they ask?"

"A hundred and fifty, but I got them down to seventy-five."

Daniel drew a long breath.

"And your advice is to pay, even when he's innocent?"

"Yes," repeated the Squire, "even if he's innocent."

Daniel was too burdened to notice the change in wording.

"That's what I had decided in my own mind. How much time can we have?"

"Oh, suit your convenience. I'll stop by McKinstrie's and tell them you'll settle if they keep their mouths shut."

"And I'll have something to say to them, too," Daniel added between his teeth.

"Don't go too fast, Mr. McDowell. I would keep my distance from the whole lot of them. Time passes, you know, and covers up all kinds of tracks. Well, I won't serve any notice or anything. When you're ready, just come into the office, and we'll clear it all up quiet."

Daniel unhitched his horse for him, and the Squire rode off down the lane, leaving Daniel standing heavy-hearted by the fence. Seventy-five dollars in ready cash was as remote as five thousand.

The locusts and tree-toads droned away the days as September advanced. The manure had all been spread upon the fields, and the fall planting of wheat was finished. And now the apples were gathered and the cider made ready to be used in the apple butter later on.

David worked from early morning till dusk, giving himself no rest. It was all settled now that he was to go to school the first of October. The letter from Dr. Donaldson had been heart-warming. He would be proud, he wrote, to admit a son of Daniel McDowell's to the Academy. As to arrangements, David could either board at one of the farmers' for a dollar and a half a week, or share one of the cabins built for the purpose around the Academy grounds—with another boy and "keep batch." The latter course had been decided upon.

David was torn between his longings. Since the terrible episode of Mag McKinstrie's trouble, life at home had seemed insupportable. He dreaded the Sabbath or a week-day trip to New Salem with something like a physical nausea. There was, too, an eating bitterness in his heart that, by a lie, Mag had thrust this burden of disgrace upon them all. He felt sometimes he would like to kill her, especially since the black afternoon that Star had been led away. That evening David had eaten no supper, and the family respected his grief. The sale of the colt had, at the last, seemed the only way to raise the immediate funds.

Both Daniel and Sarah had talked with Mag, but she had stuck so firmly to her story that they had come home rather shaken. The girl looked wretched and still begged for David to marry her. None of them had seen her since the money had been quietly turned over.

But David carried another burden on his heart. How, he wondered, could he live without seeing Terese? On the one hand the Academy with all its promise; on the other the bound girl and his love.

Sarah and the girls were unusually busy these September days. They worked every spare minute on new shirts for David. They made over a bed tick that he would fill with straw when he got to the cabin. They finished a quilt and knotted a comforter. Even Jeannie for once sat by the hour setting fine rows of stitches uncomplainingly. This was for David.

Betsy and Liza Jane talked in their room at night in low voices about it all. It was plain that many of the neighbours not only had heard the story but believed it. There were side remarks and self-conscious glances on Sabbath during intermission. The Henderson girls had even come out plainly with their questions. The McDowells had agreed at home to say as little as possible beyond a flat statement of David's innocence.

"She was always makin' sheep's eyes at him," Betsy had added, however, goaded by the look on the Henderson girls' faces. "Anybody could see she was clear daft about him. And you know there's some that'll never stop at a lie when they find other ways don't work."

But the sting of it all was always with them, added to their old anxiety for David's conversion. Before they slept each night they knelt in their coarse muslin chemises and agonised in prayer for his soul's salvation. Meanwhile Jeannie wept into her pillow over the loneliness to come, and Sarah tossed and turned with the fear of a new doubt upon her. Mag McKinstrie's story had rung so true, her little pig eyes had looked so genuinely distressed, and—as Sarah's heart deep within her kept repeating to itself—David was his father's son.

On the last day of September a quiver of suspense hung over the farmhouse. David's going the next morning was the only thing in life, at the moment, that mattered.

"If he were only not leaving under a cloud!" Liza Jane kept muttering at intervals.

The shirts were finished and laundered; the knitted wool socks, his best suit, a pair of blankets, the comforter, all were folded with meticulous care and ready to be placed in the carry-all the next morning. Jeannie by superhuman efforts had knitted a red scarf which she placed on the top of the pile, a small note fastened within it. Jeannie had wept more during the last weeks than in all the rest of her eighteen years.

After supper on his last evening, David left the house so quickly that even Jeannie missed his going. He went through the barn as he often did, laying his hand upon Star's manger. Suddenly he came face to face with Sarah, who stood waiting.

"Mother! I didn't know you were out here."

Sarah came close and put her hands on his shoulders.

"David," she said, "I—I've never said anything to you

about all this. The trouble. I wondered if you—if you'd—I just wanted——”

The stammering sentences came to a stop. But, from the look in her eyes, David understood.

“You want to hear me say that I’ve done nothing wrong,” he finished.

“Yes,” Sarah breathed.

“It’s all right, Mother. I haven’t,” he said.

Sarah’s grey eyes filled with tears. “May the Lord bless you, David, and make a good man of you and a great one too, if it’s His will.”

Then she added quickly: “And David, if you get a cold, be sure to soak your feet in hot water, and brew yourself a little camomile tea. I’m putting some bunches of herbs in a box. There’s a label on each bunch. And mind, if you’ve a tight chest, to use a mustard plaster. And mix it half and half with flour.”

“I will, Mother.”

“And I’ve written out plain the recipe for flapjack and flannel cakes. You can’t miss if you go right by it. And a cold evening, if you don’t want to cook much, just stir yourself up a pot of corn-meal mush. It’s easy done, and nourishing too.”

“I will, Mother.”

“And air your bed sometimes, David, and shake up the tick and keep things tidy. I hope your cabin mate will be a nice boy and help out with the cooking.”

“Oh, we’ll get along, never fear.”

David felt his throat filling unaccountably.

His mother put her arms quietly round him for a moment, and then left the barn quickly.

David followed her out, but turned towards the sugar meadow, his heart eager yet full of a heavy foreboding. He had avoided Terese the last few weeks. They had met only once since the trouble, but he had not told her then of his plans to go to the Academy. He had to tell her

to-night and to say good-bye. He had asked her last Sabbath to come to the meadow this evening, and he saw as soon as he entered the shadow of the great trees that she was already there.

His heart beat violently as it always did at sight of her beauty. She did not speak as she yielded herself to his embrace. They swayed together, like two slim saplings in the spring. Their lips were sweet upon each other. All their young strength melted together.

"Let's sit down," Terese said at last. "I ain't seen you much of late, David. I been lonesome. I was afraid I'd made you mad some way. But now I know it's all right."

"Of course it's all right," David returned almost gruffly. He was drunk with his love.

"We're going to have a quilting a week come Friday, David, an' Mother Forsythe says I can ask some boys in for supper along with the girls. I'm goin' to have all your girls, an' you'll be sure to come, won't you, David?"

He had not meant to tell her so soon. It was going to be harder even than he had dreamed. The foreboding in his heart grew blacker.

"Davy, you'll be sure to come?" her eager voice was repeating. "It'll be the first party I've ever been to. An' I'm gettin' a new dress—a sprigged lawn. An' after supper we're all goin' to sing, an' Father Forsythe's so pleased. He says he always wanted to see his house full of young uns. What makes you so quiet, Davy?"

"Terese, I can't come to the party. I'm going away to-morrow morning."

He felt a tremor go through her body.

"Away!" she repeated dully. "Where to?"

"To Eldersridge Academy. I'm too old to school here any more at Painter Hollow. And I've always wanted an education. I want to be a lawyer some day. I—I didn't know till just lately I could go, or I'd have told you sooner——" His voice fell off lamely, distressed.



Terese made no answer. David waited, and then drew her close against him.

"Say something, Terese. You know how I hate to leave you. Sometimes I think I can't go."

"But still you're going," she said slowly, in a voice that wrenched his heart.

"Yes, in the morning."

He had expected that she would weep as Jeannie had done, and he would cry out little endearments as he tried to comfort her. He was not prepared for this stillness, this stony quiet.

"Terese, please talk. I can't bear you to be like this. I'll be back, you know. Next summer——"

Then Terese spoke, and the words seemed to come from a heart already broken.

"You won't never come back again, Davy, like you was. You'll be different, I know. I've seen men that was edicated."

Her body trembled; then the still anguish of her voice went on.

"An' here I been learning' things so happy—quiltin' an' churnin' an' sewin' rags for carpet an' all, thinkin' some day we'd be married an' I'd know how to be a good farmer's wife. An' you're goin' to be—a—lawyer."

"Don't, Terese. I can't stand it to have you feel so bad. And me! How do you s'pose I feel? Why, we'll be just the same. Some day we can still——"

She drew away from him, an unconscious dignity in the gesture.

"You know that ain't so. Lawyers don't marry no bound girls. No, Davy, 'twon't ever be the same again."

David had never known misery like to this. His head sank on his breast. When he tried to take Terese again in his arms, she drew away. Already a gulf yawned between them, between his eager love and her pliant body. And

still she did not weep. Only the stony pain in her voice: " 'Twon't ever be the same again."


At last she rose. "I'll be goin' back now. Good-bye—David."

He was mad with longing for her then. He sprang up and caught her fiercely to him. And suddenly he felt the stiffness go out of her body. They kissed as they had never done before, all their young passion poured out as though for the last time.

Then David turned and flung himself out of the meadow. He stumbled blindly along the fence rows, only half knowing where he went.

For a terrible omniscience had fallen upon him which he was too young to bear. He knew that he would love again. But he knew, too, that no other love would ever be the same to him as this first sweet one from which he was turning away. Something deep within him bled at the knowledge.

And yet he did not go back.



## CHAPTER V

DANIEL AND DAVID LEFT EARLY THE NEXT MORNING. The spicy air of October was abroad, with the memories of summer dews and the hint of autumn frosts both within it. The girls had shivered in the chill grey light as they prepared breakfast, still knowing that the mid-day would bring oppressive heat.

David, himself, innocent of the thought that to a later generation his equipment would seem odd for a boy leaving for boarding school, placed his luggage and provisions in the light spring wagon: first the carpet-bag containing his clothes, and the bedclothing and empty tick well wrapped in newspapers. Then came a bag of flour and one of corn meal; a crock of butter and one of apple butter; a couple of hams and sides of bacon; eight large loaves of bread; a sack of dried apples, a skillet, conee pot, iron pot, plates, cups, spoons, knives and forks—all checked over carefully by Sarah and the girls.

He was ready at last. Daniel was on the wagon seat, nervously fingering the reins. The awkward good-byes had been said to Liza Jane and Betsy; Sarah had kissed him and run out a minute later with the precious box of herbs.

"Be sure to keep these safe, David, and use them when you don't feel up to the mark. They're all labelled."

"I will, Mother. Don't worry. I'll be fine."

"Good-bye! Good-bye!"

Liza Jane and Betsy on the back porch wiping their eyes on their aprons! Mother standing by the hitching post at the top of the lane, trying to wave him off bravely.

"Good-bye, Davy, good-bye!"

Jeannie, inconsolable at the separation, had climbed to the seat beside him.

"I'll ride as far as the road, Father."

She held David's hand tightly as the wagon rattled down the lane, but she could not speak.

As they turned into the main road Daniel drew the horse to a stop.

"Now, out with you, Jeannie. And don't take on so. You ought to be thankful David has the chance to go. Now dry up your tears before you get back to the house."

Jeannie tried hard, but a sharp little sob escaped her as she clung to David's neck.

"The letters. You won't forget the letters, Davy."

"No fear. I'll write to you, Jeannie. Good-bye, now."

David's eyes had a suspicious mist in them as he turned to wave to the slight, disconsolate figure by the fence. He turned around to look once again as the road dipped. Jeannie was still there, the tears running unhindered down her cheeks.

But before she had reached the top of the lane, Jeannie, as was her wont, had begun to feel about for comfort. David had told her once that he'd ask Father to bring her over to Eldersridge sometimes when he was coming so she could see the place. And in a week she might get the first letter! And she would have to remember all the news of the countryside to tell David when she answered. And he would be home for Christmas! Even though her heart still felt strangely sore, it was a reasonably cheerful face Jeannie turned upon Sarah and the girls as she entered the kitchen.

Through the morning, while the big outside bake-oven was being fired for a second baking for themselves, and the fat loaves were taken from the round woven baskets where they had been set to rise, and slid into the oven on long wooden paddles, the conversation of the women centred upon the travellers.

"They'll be well on the Pike by this time. I hope the day don't get too hot for them."

"They'll be about eating a little snack now. Did you mind to put in the cookies, Betsy?"

"They'll be at the Academy now. I hope he'll get a nice boy to batch with him. It'll be a long, lonely ride back for Father."

It was nearly eleven o'clock that night when Daniel drove slowly into the barnyard. Jeannie, overcome by sleep, had gone to bed, but the others were waiting up for him, though nine o'clock was regular bedtime. When he came into the kitchen, Sarah hurried to set out a late supper for him while the girls plied him with questions. Daniel was tired, and details irritated him. So he gave the main facts briefly, without enlarging upon them. They had reached Eldersridge safely; David had a pleasant young man to share his cabin; Daniel had had a long and satisfactory talk with Pater Donaldson. That was all.

When he rose from the table, however, he turned to Sarah.

"I almost forgot something of importance. I stopped by at Henderson's to see if the new teacher had come, and I found them very much upset. It seems Mrs. Henderson's mother has come from Ohio unexpected, to spend the winter, and she'll have to have the extra room they always give the teacher. They asked if we would want to board Mr. Richards. They seem put out at losing him, but Mrs. Henderson says she can't manage as things are. What do you think, Sarah?"

"Why, we've plenty of room, and with David away it would brighten up the winter for us. Why, of course we can take him. And him such a fine young man!"

"Well, I'll go over in the morning early and bring him and his baggage over. Mr. Henderson met him to-day at Greensburg. Now, come, come, it's time we were all in bed."

The girls did not speak until they were in their room and then Betsy turned to Liza Jane, her cheeks scarlet, her round blue eyes wet with their usual easy tears. Her voice trembled with emotion and delight.

"Can you believe it, Liza Jane? To think of us having him after all! I know I won't sleep a wink for thinkin' of it. If he's here all the time, getting to know us real well, surely—I mean—Oh, Liza Jane, who knows what may come of it!"

Liza Jane's own heart was skipping a beat, but she held her face steady.

"Well, the board money will come in handy this winter, that's sure."

"Won't it, though! I'd forgot about that. Liza, how old do you think he is?"

"He isn't so young. He must be nearly thirty. He worked himself through college, the Hendersons said, and he may have been in the War, dear knows."

Betsy sat on the edge of the bed in her muslin chemise, her long light hair curling over her shoulders. There was about her a soft voluptuousness. Her tender breasts were ripe for love.

"The ages would be just right," she murmured, then flushed, ashamed. "I mean," she added hastily, "lots of men marry wives a little older than they are. And you *are* young-looking for thirty-eight, Liza Jane. And you're smarter in books than I ever was."

The older girl brushed her plain dark hair back from her forehead as she stood before the mirror. There was about her own face a chaste and finely chiselled beauty.

"Don't be foolish," she said shortly. "Who'd want an old thing like me! We'd better get to bed and to sleep now, for there'll be plenty to do in the morning."

But when the light was out, and Betsy's fluttered sighs had at last given place to regular breathing, Liza Jane still lay awake. Something in her heart which she had



thought dead and buried was stirring to life again. She knew she did not look her age.

In the eaves room adjoining, curled in a soft ball, Jeannie slept peacefully on, unaware.

In the morning there was excitement a plenty. The whole house must be gone over and the spare room rendered immaculate before Daniel returned from the Hendersons' with the new teacher. Jeannie, enjoying to the full the sudden change in the family routine, ran upstairs and down, fetching and carrying as the older girls ordered, asking endless questions as she went.

Betsy's hands shook as she tacked a fresh splasher on the wall behind the washstand. It was done in red cross-stitch and said: "Many waters cannot wash out love." She hung the best towels over the wooden rack while Liza Jane made up the big low-poster bed. Jeannie dusted the bureau, the marble-topped side table and the heavy round walnut frames that set off the faces of Grandfather and Grandmother McDowell above the mantelpiece.

"There ought to be some books on the table to sort of fill it up, like. Run down to the parlour, Jeannie, and bring up Young's *Night Thoughts* and the *National Gazetteer*. Any time Father wants them, we can bring them down again."

"Wouldn't the *Natural Theology* be better, seeing he's going to be a minister?" Liza Jane suggested.

"Mebbe it would. Bring it, Jeannie, instead of the gazetteer."

At last there was nothing more to be done in the guest room. The girls surveyed it with satisfaction, and all went downstairs together. Five minutes later, when Jeannie turned to speak to them, she found her older sisters gone. It was just at that moment that Betsy, tiptoeing softly through the upper hall, pushed open the spare room door and confronted Liza Jane already

there. Each girl was carrying in her arms her choicest quilt: Betsy's "Rag-wheel of Destruction" in bright reds and greens; Liza Jane's a "Sunburst" in all shades of yellow.

"I just began to think he might need an extra ply of something over the feet," Liza Jane said hastily.

"And there's nothing but that 'Nine-Patch' one of Mother's on the bed. It's such an ordinary pattern." Betsy's voice trembled a little.

As with common consent they folded their quilts, virginally new and unused and draped them side by side over the footboard.

"After all, there's no sense keeping things laid away, all the time," Liza Jane said sharply, the colour still warm in her cheeks.

"Things are made to use," Betsy agreed.

But they did not meet each other's eyes as they left the room for the second time.

At ten o'clock Jeannie spied the spring wagon coming up the lane. The older girls ran to the windows, smoothing their clean gingham aprons as they went.

"Oh, Mother, look! Father's bringing him in the back way. What'll he think of us?" Betsy wailed.

"He'll know the kitchen well enough if he's going to live a winter with us," Sarah returned calmly.

There was the sound of thick boots on the back porch, and the men entered. Daniel's usually serious countenance was broken in a smile. It was evident his first impressions of the new guest were pleasant ones.

"My wife, Mr. Richards, and my daughters—Liza Jane, Betsy, and Jeannie."

The young man shook hands with Sarah, and then slowly repeated the names of the girls as he turned to greet them.

"Miss Liza Jane, Miss Betsy, and—Miss Jeannie."

As usual Jeannie broke the ice.

"You can't 'Miss' me, Mr. Richards, because I'll be going to school to you."

The young man's eyes twinkled down at her. "Then it's 'Jeannie' for you," he said, and turned to Sarah again.

"It is more than good of you to take me in, Mrs. McDowell. Having no home of my own, I am especially sensitive to the influences of a fine Christian family such as this. I hope I may prove worthy of your kindness."

Sarah flushed with pleasure. To her it seemed a courtly speech. James Richards himself, as he stood in the plain farm kitchen, seemed to need but the swirl of a cape about his shoulders, a sword at his side, and a plume on his head, to make him a knight of old. He was more than six feet tall, with a fine breadth of shoulders and a ripple of arm muscles that could be imagined by the grip of his hand. But there was no heavy clumsiness about him, rather the grace of perfectly co-ordinated strength. The women standing close to him for the moment under the spell of his dark eyes were all conscious of his young virility.

"We're glad to have you, Mr. Richards. We're plain people, but I hope we can make you comfortable. Run ahead, Jeannie, and see the door of his room's open while Father helps him up with his trunk."

But the young man lifted the small chest lightly in his arms.

"Don't bother, Mr. McDowell. I can easily take it if Miss—if Jeannie will show me the way."

Jeannie flew off importantly to the front stairs. When she reached the north chamber, she opened the door and went in.

"I hope you'll like the room," she said eagerly over her shoulder. "We fixed it all up this morning. Why——" She had run to the bed. "My goodness, Betsy and Liza Jane have put out their best quilts for you! The ones

they keep laid away to get married with! They never told me they were doing it!"

"That's very kind of them."

Mr. Richards stood waiting near the door. Jeannie opened the closet. "This is a good big clothespress. Can I help you hang up your things? I always fix David's for him."

"No, thank you. I'm sure I can manage."

"Would you like some warm water?"

"No, really. Thanks."

Jeannie sat down on the cane chair and spread out her skirts.

"I'll visit with you while you get settled," she remarked graciously.

Mr. Richards, still waiting by the door, smiled and coloured a little.

"Don't you think you had better run on downstairs now? I'll be there in a few minutes."

Jeannie sprang up as though he had struck her. She drew herself up to her full height, her cheeks scarlet.

"Do you realise that I'll be nineteen next spring? I'm a grown-up young lady, and you send me off as though I were a mere child!"

She tried to make a dignified exit worthy of her feelings, but as she passed Mr. Richards he laid his hands upon the little brown curls that framed her face. He was laughing.

"I'm not so sure about the 'grown-up' part, Jeannie, but I like you the better for it."

Down in the kitchen Jeannie nursed her grievance.

"I don't think I'm going to like him, Mother. He *laughed* at me!"

Sarah was busy over the stove. The excitement of the new teacher's coming was welcome to her heart, strained as it was with David's leaving and the cause of it.

"Whisht, Jeannie! You mustn't talk that way. He's

a fine young man and your teacher, besides, and you must always be respectful to him and learn all you can from his refined ways. It's a privilege to have him here. Take this pan, now, and run out to the back lot and bring in a few turnips for dinner."

Down in the spring-house the older girls lifted heavy crocks from the chill water and prepared for an extra churning. Betsy suddenly caught her sister's arm.

"Liza Jane, it's going to be awful. I didn't realise till I stood there close to him. He's so strong and handsome, and we won't know whether he's ever going to—to like us. . . . Oh, God help me, I love him already! Mebbe it'll be harder than if he hadn't come."

Betsy's fair head bent low in shame above the churn dasher.

"Pray for me, Liza, that my thoughts may not become—carnal."

Liza Jane straightened. "Tut, tut!" she said brusquely. "What we've got to do is to mind our work from day to day and accept what the Lord sorts out for us. I think you need more hot water in that milk. I'll go and get it."

That evening the sunset was smoky red behind the sugar meadow, where the maples lifted their massed leaves like an altar of gold. There was incense in the air, the wistful, aching fragrance of October. Jeannie, coming up the lane in the early dusk, was keenly sensitive to it. She had been over at Forsythes', and while there had discovered a secret. She and Terese had been down at the spring, when the bound girl suddenly threw her arms around her friend's neck and cried so despairingly that Jeannie was frightened.

"Why, Terese, what's the matter? Are you sick? Are Forsythes not—not *good* to you?"

"Oh, my, *yes!*"

"Then what is it? You're having the new dress and the quiltin' party——"

"I don't want them now," came a muffled voice.

All at once Jeannie's clasp about her tightened. Her own heart pointed the way.

"Would—would it be David?" she whispered.

Terese stopped sobbing, stiffened. At last she raised her head.

"Don't tell any one, ever," she said. "I didn't mean you to know, but it just came over me. I'll feel better if I can talk to you sometimes, though."

"Why, I'll tell you everything," Jeannie stammered. "I'll show you his letters, and mebbe you can write to him, too. I'm trying not to cry too much, and you mustn't either. He'll be back again before we know it!"

But in the other girl's silence Jeannie became slowly aware that their cases were not parallel. Terese had stepped over an invisible border line into a strange country of which she knew nothing. And David had gone with her. Jeannie felt miserably alone.

As she walked up the lane the memory of Mr. Richards' laughter in the morning rankled still.

"I wonder if I'll *never* grow up and be treated like a lady! Even Terese is different somehow from me, and she's just my age. He wouldn't laugh at her!"

She slipped into the kitchen, where the family were already at supper. Mr. Richards stopped his conversation to smile at her as she seated herself. But his dark eyes, she saw, were still laughing.

The evening was chilly. Daniel, looking from the kitchen door at the clear starry night, said there would be a heavy frost. He brought kindling and coal and made the season's first fire in the sitting-room grate. Betsy brought a pan of Rambó apples from the cellar. A pleasing air of household intimacy settled upon the room and included the young stranger. It had already been discovered that Mr. Richards had entertaining tales to tell. He had travelled as far as western Ohio, and



worked for a year on the canal boats, to earn money for college. But, more important than all, he had been in the war—only a youth of nineteen then—and had seen Lincoln, and Grant, and Sheridan! All this explained why at twenty-eight he still lacked a year of being through the Theological Seminary.

Daniel's questions were keen and interested. Sarah and the girls sat breathless as the low rich voice of their guest cast a spell upon them. They all started when the clock struck nine.

"Fetch the Bible, Jeannie." Daniel spoke over his shoulder towards the spot where his youngest daughter had been a few moments before. "It's time we——"

But Jeannie was not there. Nor was she in the kitchen.

"She'll be out at the orchard fence sitting on the post, I'll warrant," Betsy said rather irritably. "That's where she and David always went to look at the stars or something. I'll go and get her."

But Mr. Richards sprang up. "Let me go, Miss Betsy! I really want a breath of air before bedtime. Please!"

He was gone on the instant. He strode along the path towards the barn, drinking deep of the air with its crisp leafy tang. He had seen more varying phases of life than most young men his age, but he had never known greater satisfaction than now in the McDowell home. He felt as though that inner driving gale of his own spirit which had forced him relentlessly towards the career of his choice, had somehow blown him, for the winter, into a peaceful haven. Sarah McDowell, with her calm grey eyes, was a woman such as his own mother had been. And Daniel had a mind worth any man's meeting. As for the older daughters, they were pleasant, friendly girls, and Jeannie! He smiled again, as he had done each time during the day when he thought of her.

Funny little Jeannie whom he was coming now to seek.

The night brightened about him as his eyes grew accustomed to it. The barn and outbuildings loomed gray just ahead. To the right, the orchard lay bathed in its own winey fragrance. He stood looking about. Should he call? All at once the dark top of one of the fence posts moved slightly. He crossed quickly to it. Two bright eyes and one incorrigible curl looked at him from the enveloping folds of a gray shawl which Jeannie held tightly over her head.

They looked at each other gravely, and then Jeannie whispered, "Did you come out to see them, too?"

"See what, Jeannie?"

"The spangled host."

The young man started.

"I don't quite understand."

"It's Milton," she said. "Father has the book. It says: 'And all the spangled host keep watch in squadrons bright.' I like to watch them marching across the sky, but David always used to come out with me."

"You miss your brother, don't you?"

Jeannie's voice had a sharp catch in it.

"Oh, I miss him terrible! I don't know how I'll ever get along without David."

Mr. Richards studied the profile beside him, etched delicately against the darkness of the night.

"I know the names of some of the 'spangled host,'" he said. "What you might call the captains of the squadrons."

Jeannie turned quickly, her voice ecstatic. "Oh, *do* you? Davy and I just knew the North Star and the Dipper. Would you teach me?"

"Of course. We'll begin now with one, then we must hurry in. I was sent to fetch you for prayers. Do you see the big bright one up there, a little more to the west? No, not that one—there! That's Arcturus!"

Jeannie tilted rapturously, her shawl dropping from her. Mr. Richards caught her before she fell, and lifted her down—a featherweight in his arms.

“The top of a fence post isn’t the best place to study astronomy,” he said, laughing. “It’s safest to have two feet on the ground.”

“Davy always held me,” Jeannie returned innocently; “but I wouldn’t expect you to. Will you come out sometimes with me, though, and tell me the names of the rest? Will you, Mr. Richards?”

“Of course, all I know. Now we must hurry in.”

At the back porch Jeannie paused and turned around.

“Good-night, Arcturus,” she said softly. “I’ve been very pleased to meet you!”

Daniel was fingering the Bible impatiently as they entered the sitting-room. Mr. Richards sat down in his chair, and Jeannie dropped upon the small stool by her mother’s side, her head resting on Sarah’s lap.

The chapter was a long one. Before it was half finished, Jeannie’s brown lashes drooped quietly upon her cheeks. She was asleep.

When Betsy stole a hidden glance at Mr. Richards she saw that his eyes were fixed upon Jeannie. She withdrew her own gaze, satisfied. She had feared he might be looking at Liza Jane.

The Painter Hollow schoolhouse was a small one-story log building that stood in a clearing of the woods a mile from the McDowell home. A sharp ravine behind it where years before a resident had killed a panther (“painter,” in the local vernacular) gave the district its name. The schoolhouse had weathered the onslaught of forty hard Pennsylvania winters as well as of the recurring crops of children that stormed its rickety wooden steps each fall. There was talk in the township of erecting a new building; but it had gone no further, and the

ancient logs, rechinked by a mason now and then, still held.

Mr. Richards and Jeannie, bearing books and a joint lunch basket, appeared on the edge of the clearing at seven-thirty o'clock Monday morning.

"I can hear the chart class for you sometimes, if you like," Jeannie was saying. "I always used to for the last teacher. You see, I'm the oldest scholar."

"Pupil," Mr. Richards said, smiling.

"What's the difference? We always say 'scholars.'"

"A scholar is supposed to be a very wise man who has learned almost all there is to know. A pupil is one who is just learning."

Jeannie giggled. "If I talk about the 'pupils,' they'll all think I'm stuck up, using a new word."

"Never be afraid of the new, Jeannie, if it's right."

Jeannie looked up him quickly. "That's funny. David said something like that once. Well, here we are."

Mr. Richards took a large key from his pocket, unlocked the heavy door with some difficulty, and they went in. A stale odour of damp chalk dust and saliva-cleaned slates still clung to the room, together with the ghosts of departed lunches. Mr. Richards threw open the windows with a violent movement of his strong arms. Jeannie set her basket on the long bench near the door, then selected the most advantageous place at the back desk of the girls' side, which ran its length along the side wall. In front of it, in terraced fashion, extended the other long desks with their accompanying benches, with the lowest for the tiniest pupils bordering the wide centre aisle of the room, where stood the pot-bellied iron stove. The boys' side opposite corresponded to that of the girls'.

Jeannie chose a spot near the centre, directly in line with the stove, having learned from the experience of other winters that this was the best location for a cold

day. She put her books neatly inside the desk. There was Noah Webster's blue-backed Speller, McGuffey's Sixth Reader (Jeannie fingered it tenderly; she loved to read aloud), Greenough's Grammar, and Ray's Higher Arithmetic. She made a small face at the latter. There were still one or two problems at the back that gave her a struggle each year. The one, for instance, about the grindstone, and the other about the two globes in the corner of the room!

She placed her slate on the top of the desk and laid a folded scrap of gingham ostentatiously beside it. The "slate-rag" was the badge of aristocracy amongst the girls. Those occupying a lower social position used the sleeves of their dresses. The right sleeve of Mag McKinstrie's flannel gown, Jeannie recalled as she twitched a sensitive nose, had been quite stiff before last winter was over. Thank goodness Mag wouldn't be sitting beside her this year! Then Jeannie caught her breath sharply at the thought of all Mag's absence from school meant to her.

She rose abruptly and went forward to the raised front rostrum where the teacher's desk stood. Mr. Richards was setting up the "chart," which wobbled on its rusty iron tripod. Jeannie leafed through it with a practised hand until the page of A B C's stood exposed. A sound at the front door made them both turn. Terese stood there, with Big Bob himself towering behind her. Jeannie flew to her friend, her cheeks red with excitement.

"Terese! You're not—coming to school! Really!"

Terese nodded happily, then said in a low tone: "Ain't they good to me, Jeannie? They seen I was frettin' over something, an' they thought this was it. I'd never have asked it, me bound out an' all, but they told me I could come. My, but I'll study hard, and I'll work more mornings and evenings to make up the time."

"Oh, Terese, it's wonderful. We'll sit beside each other



and eat our lunches together and everything. Did you bring a slate-rag? I'll tear you off half of mine. And I'll show you. . . ."

She led Terese to the desk and began to explain the intricacies of education as they were practised at Painter Hollow.

Meanwhile Big Bob had been talking to Mr. Richards. They made a striking pair, for their eyes met on a level.

"Well, well, if it ain't good to meet up with a *reg'lar*-sized man once!" Big Bob said warmly, as he shook the younger man's hand. "Yes, sir, seems like they don't make 'em our size very often these days. Sort of economisin' on material. Well, don't know how you feel about it, but I was always sort of glad the Lord A'mighty used a fair-sized pattern when he was makin' me. Stranger round these parts, ain't ye?"

"Yes," Mr. Richards answered, "though I've gone to college at Canonsburg and to the Seminary in Allegheny. Not so very far off."

"So! College man an' preacher! Real edjicated. Well, I guess it's all right if you can carry it. I never got much schoolin'. Jist a couple of months a winter when my pap thought there wasn't anything for me to do at home. Funny how some folks feel about edjication, ain't it?"

Big Bob shoved his hands deeper in his corduroy trousers and rocked back and forth. A smile twinkled in his eyes and spread over his full face.

"When I hear folks talkin' about an edjication I al'ays think of old Dave Swinkly. He used to keep tavern at Blairsville in my pap's day. Great old character, he was. Plenty of horse sense, but no use at all for book learnin'. Any show of it sort of nettled him, some way. Well, one night the stage from Philadelphy got in kinda late, and a lot of people come into the tavern to stay the night. One of them was a perfessor in some college or other.



He struts up to the desk where old Swinkly was standin', an' begins right off tellin' him who he was an' that he has to give a lecture next night; an' he wants his best room an' his quietest so's he can practise up on it.

"Well, old Swinkly didn't like the cut of his jib at all, so he puts him in the room right over the bar for deviltry. As the evenin' wore on, things got pretty lively. Old Swinkly was famed for keepin' a pretty rough place. There was a good deal of drinkin' an' some songs an' stories not jist suitable for a ladies' quilting party. Long about midnight the perfessor comes prancin' down with his carpet-bag in his hand. 'Look-ee here,' he says. 'I'm a man of edjication an' refinement, an' am I to have to listen to this vile uproar?' he says. 'Is there no place in this town where a man can get a quiet night's repose?' he says.

"My pap was there at the time, an' he said old Swinkly shut one eye and looked awful solemn. 'Yes,' he says, 'there is another place, but it sort of goes again the grain to recommend rival lodgin's,' he says.

"'I'll pay you your money here the same as if I stayed,' says the perfessor, 'but I've got to go where it's quiet, an' *refined*,' he says.

"'Well,' says old Swinkly, 'there's never any loud talkin' in this place I have in mind—at least never after ten o'clock.'

"'Is it expensive?' says the perfessor. 'Well,' says old Swinkly, 'if you was stayin' there a considerable spell it does cost somethin' pretty, specially for the best quarters; but jist for one night you'll find it real cheap,' he says 'an' quiet, very quiet. Jist you go out Main Street to where the road forks and turn to your right, an' there you are. 'Tain't far.'

"The perfessor paid his money down an' left, sayin' he'd be back for the stage next mornin'.

"Nobody batted an eye till he was gone, an' then my

pap an' the other men that knowed the town jist rolled over laughin'. For that golderned old cuss Swinkly had directed him to the *graveyard*!"

Big Bob's great laugh filled the small room and seemed to shake the plaster loose between the logs. Mr. Richards laughed, too, though he glanced around to reassure himself the girls were busy with their own conversation.

"Well, now, Mr. Richards, if you'll jist give me an idee what books Terese here will need I'll drive in to New Salem to Galloway's an' pick them up. She's a smart little girl, an' we want to give her a chance." Big Bob dropped his voice, and beckoned Mr. Richards to follow him outside. "She was with a medicine show from the time she was twelve till we got her. Help her all you can, will you, sir? It'll be an everlastin' favour to me."

Mr. Richards smiled into the older man's anxious eyes. "Of course I'll help her. And thank you for telling me. Here"—he jotted hastily on a scrap of paper—"here are the books you'd better get right away. I'll tell you later about the others."

Big Bob still hesitated. Then with an effort he went on, his voice very low. "Mr. Richards," he said, "I got into some trouble awhile back in harvest time. As I recollect it, you was preachin' at Confluence the very Sunday I took in my wheat. Well, it's jist give me a black eye, sort of, amongst the good folks round here. You must have heard tell of it. Now, what I'm gettin' at is, if you can help it jist don't think of my shortcomin's in connection with Terese here. I want her to have every chance, d'you understand?"

James Richards held out his hand. He smiled with the charm that was peculiarly his own.

"Only last night I heard that you were famed for being a kind husband and a good neighbour. That's all I seem able to remember about you, Mr. Forsythe!"

Big Bob grasped the young man's hand.

"I believe," he said huskily, "that you and me is goin' to be friends."

"I'm sure of it. Drop in and visit the school some time."

There was a whoop from the edge of the clearing, and a half-dozen small boys advanced towards the schoolhouse. Mr. Richards re-entered the room. Big Bob drove off down the road.

At nine o'clock Mr. Richards went to the front door and rang the big handbell. The boys playing "over-ball" over the top of the schoolhouse, exploring the coal-shed room, or cracking butternuts on a stone by the road, all dropped their pursuits and came awkwardly inside with a great clattering of thick shoes. The girls in the clean gingham pinafores were already in their places, pleasantly a-twitter over the novelty of the handsome new teacher.

Mr. Richards walked to his desk and opened the Bible. He read the eighth Psalm. When he reached the words, "When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained," he looked up. Jeannie's gray eyes were fixed upon him with an expression so luminously beautiful that he felt the colour come to his cheeks at his own consciousness of it. He finished the Psalm without raising his eyes. A strange prescience of deep waters ahead had assailed him.

After the prayer, Mr. Richards spoke to his pupils in a way that was new to Painter Hollow. Corporal punishment was a thing so customary that the boys had already noted with surprise the absence of any stick. But they had also taken the measure of the man who stood, six-feet-two, before them. He was saying now that he wanted to be their friend; that he was there to teach them, and that so long as they themselves did not make it necessary there would be no birch or ruler used. As the boys exchanged covert glances, Mr. Richards added with a

twinkle: "Of course, I have a pretty strong right arm, and the grove out here is full of young saplings. But, remember, I don't want to use either unless you make me."

The hours settled into their routine. By afternoon it seemed as though there had been no summer intervening between this and the last school day. The little five-and-six-year-olds scuffed their weary shoes along the front benches. At either side against the wall, the older boys and girls whispered quietly together as they worked over their arithmetic. Slate pencils squeaked, a few low droning sounds came from those conning words out of the blue-backed spellers, while at the front along the rostrum stood the Third Reader class, books in hand, reading aloud, "The Obedient Casabianca." With the usual number of jerks, pauses, breaks, and corrections the tale was unfolding.

"Still this n-noble-hearted boy would not disobey his father. In the face of blood, and balls, and fire he stood firm and *obedient*. 'Father, may I go?' the boy cried out. But no word of per-permission could come from the m-m-mang-mangled body of his lifeless father; and the boy, not knowing he was dead, would rather die than disobey."

"Very good, John. The next paragraph, Jennie."

So the sounds rose and fell, and recess and four o'clock marked the completion of the first day.

When the rest had all gone, Terese and Jeannie busied themselves sweeping out the schoolhouse. Mr. Richards arranged his books, and then in a carefully slanting hand wrote across the top of the blackboard, "Evil communications corrupt good manners" (this for a "copy" for the older pupils next day). On the lower corner he wrote,

a, b—ab

b, a—ba

for the chart class, and opposite, "Seconds and minutes make the hours," for the intermediate classes.

At last the windows were down, the door was locked, and they started home through the mellow October afternoon, Jeannie and Terese chatting as they walked ahead. The young maples were golden, and the sumac wove a scarlet border at the roadside. In the field next the woods the corn stood shocked, with piles of yellow pumpkins showing richly in between. Mr. Richards drank the full-flavoured air and tried to recall what the poets had said of autumn. He must not, he reminded himself, let his mind go to seed this winter while he was teaching children their A B C's. He must read to good purpose in the evenings.

But somehow his thoughts and his eyes came steadily back to Jeannie's slender figure in front of him. She was talking animatedly to her friend, her short brown curls bobbing as she turned. Suddenly she stumbled over a stone in the path and went down in a small ignominious heap. Mr. Richards ran quickly, but she was sitting up when he reached her, looking ruefully at her dusty pinafore.

"Are you hurt?" His voice was anxious.

"Oh, no more than usual," Jeannie said calmly. "I'm always falling. David says I'll get killed some day with it. The trouble is," she went on as she accepted the help of his hand to rise, "that I can't remember to look at my feet. There's always so many other things to think about."

She resumed her conversation with Terese again as though nothing had happened. Mr. Richards dropped behind them, smiling. The dark, striking beauty of Terese left him cold. But Jeannie! "A most interesting and unusual child," he said to himself with praiseworthy decorum.

As they turned in to the McDowell lane after saying



good-bye to Terese, Mr. Richards asked, "Are you coming out to-night to watch the 'spangled host,' Jeannie?"

"Oh, yes, if you'll have time to come, too."

"I think I can manage it," said Mr. Richards.

But that night something happened to make the stars seem even farther off than usual. A bright fire had been built in the sitting-room grate; the usual dish of apples was on the table. Sarah and the older girls sat knitting while Jeannie between her father and Mr. Richards worked arithmetic with an occasional word of advice from each. An atmosphere of singular peace filled the room. Suddenly there was a sharp yap of a hound outside, the sound of hasty footsteps on the back porch and a thunderous knock on the door itself. Sarah, being nearest, went to open it. Old McKinstrie, bareheaded, his face terrified, stepped into the kitchen.

"Mrs. McDowell," he panted, "it's Mag. She's took bad. It's her time come two months early. She's sufferin' terrible. Liz an' me, we don't know what to do. Could—could you come quick?"

Sarah stood for a moment as though graven to the spot; then she took a step nearer McKinstrie.

"You dare to ask *me* to go to Mag! You *dare* to! After what her lies and wickedness have done to me and mine? If she's suffering now, she well deserves it, and as for me, I'll lift no finger to help her. And you can tell her so."

The old man had fallen back before the white fury of her face. "But—but——" he broke in miserably.

"Go to some of the other neighbours if you need a woman. There's more than me, surely, has been at a birth. Only go, and never set foot in my house again, none of you!"

She shut the door, and came back into the sitting-room, which now held a hush as of death. Mr. Richards had quietly removed himself from the family circle and



sat in a far corner, apparently deep in a book. The others, even Daniel, remained speechless. For the first time in their lives they had heard Sarah give way to uncontrolled anger. She sat down in the chair she had left, and picked up her knitting, her lips set tight, her face a white mask. The clock ticked on. And still no one spoke.

At nine Daniel signed to Jeannie to bring the Bible. He leafed through it, and cleared his throat. Suddenly Sarah sprang up, trembling.

"Daniel, put the book down and saddle old Nell. Hurry! I'll ride behind you. It'll be quicker than getting the buggy. Hurry, Daniel. I've got to go. No matter what Mag's done to us, she's in trouble enough now, and she has no mother. Liza Jane, run up to the chest in the hall and bring all those old muslin cloths. I'll need them. Fetch the camphor bottle and clean towels and soap, Jeannie. The covered basket, Betsy, and my shawl. Hurry, everybody. I've lost time enough."

It was Mother again who spoke and not the white-lipped stranger. Mr. Richards ran to the barn with Daniel. It was he who helped Sarah to her seat on a folded horse blanket behind her husband, as he bestrode old Nell. They rode off down the lane.

When they came in sight of the McKinstrie's shack, Daniel spoke, with an effort.

"You're a good woman, Sarah. You're doing your duty."

Sarah felt a warmth creep about her heart. It was the first compliment she could ever remember receiving from Daniel.

As they dismounted they all but ran into old McKinstrie, his tousled gray hair rampant, his face distraught. He had evidently found no other woman to help him. His relief now was pathetic.

"I'm here, Mr. McKinstrie. I'll do all I can for Mag. Don't think again of what I said." Sarah spoke hurriedly. "It wasn't Christian."

Mag was lying in a dirty bed in the disorderly front room. Two lean hounds slunk out the door as Sarah entered. Liz, frightened and useless, was weeping in the corner. A sharp scream from Mag was followed by a long shuddering moan. Sarah laid aside her shawl quickly and went to the bed.

She passed her cool hand over the girl's hot forehead. Mag's small pig-like eyes looked wildly up at her.

"Don't scream, Mag. It wastes your strength. Try to bear it. I'll stay with you now and help you through. How long has she been in bad pain, Liz?"

"Since early morning. It's been awful."

"Why didn't you send for me sooner?"

"Pap wanted to go, but Mag wouldn't let him. She—she was shamed, I guess."

Sarah bent to her practical ministrations. She had helped more than one child into the world before the doctor got there, if indeed he was called at all.

In a few minutes she straightened, her face tense. She went at once to the kitchen, where the men were waiting, and closed the door behind her.

"Daniel," she said, "there's got to be a doctor as fast as we can get him. You'll have to ride in to New Salem."

Old McKinstrie's chin quivered.

"Is it so bad with Mag?"

"It's going to be a breach birth—feet first. I know, for I've had two myself. It's bad labour. Get Dr. Sterrett, Daniel, and don't let the grass grow under your feet."

After midnight Mag's terrible screams stopped. She lay breathing heavily, a high red flush on either cheek, her small eyes half closed.

"Mrs.—McDowell——" she whispered thickly.

"Yes, Mag. I'm here."

"It—wasn't—David."

"I know, Mag. Don't think about it now."

"It—was—Henderson's Gus. If I—die—will I—be *lost?*"

Sarah bent nearer. "No, Mag," she said, forcing her voice to steadiness. "You mind about the bad woman in the Bible. Jesus forgave her."

"You—pray."

Sarah took Mag's hand in both her own and knelt beside her.

"O God, our heavenly Father, look down in mercy on this young girl. Forgive her from her sin. If it is Thy will, help her safely through this night, and, if not, receive her to Thy keeping in Heaven. For Jesus' sake, Amen."

A convulsion rent Mag. It was as though Nature were making one last supreme effort to save the new life it had so inauspiciously begun. Then Mag lay still. Sarah saw the flush die out of the cheeks, and a strange blue come into the lips. She worked with desperation then, stopping at nothing. But when the clock struck again she knew there was nothing more to be done. The room grew very quiet. Liz, thinking all was well, dozed off in her chair. Old McKinstrie had wandered out to the stable an hour before. One of the hounds slunk in now to lie once more before the fire. Sarah knelt by the bed, her hands locked. She was still there when the sound of horses' hoofs came to her from the road. She drew the sheet softly over Mag's face and went out to meet the men.

It was almost daybreak when she and Daniel left at last. All that brave woman-hands could do, Sarah had done that night both for the living and for the dead. She leaned now against Daniel, exhausted, as they moved slowly along through the ghostly half-light. Their silence was broken but once. As they turned up the lane Sarah said with difficulty, "Just before she died, she—cleared David."

"Was there a witness?" Daniel asked sharply.

Sarah started. "Oh, I never thought of that. There was only Liz, and she was dozing. It's as bad for us as ever, then, I guess."

"The ways of God are past finding out," said Daniel heavily.

On the back porch Sarah's limbs suddenly gave way under her. She stumbled. Then the door opened and she was drawn inside by a pair of strong arms. James Richards, fully dressed, was there. There was a wood fire in the stove, and the reviving odour of fresh hot coffee in the kitchen. It was his hands that loosed her shawl and hung it up; that steadied the cup as it shook in her fingers.

"I thought you would need a hot drink," he said. "Now you must go to bed and make your sleep up in the morning, you and Mr. McDowell both. I'll attend to the stock before I go to school. And the girls can manage without you. Did—is everything all right with the McKinstrie girl?"

The tears she had been unable to weep all night came now as Sarah shook her head. And from the barn, as Daniel opened the kitchen door, came the shrill crow of a rooster ushering in the new day as blithely as though over the hill death had not just won a double victory in the night time.

## CHAPTER SIX

THE SNOW FELL EARLY THAT WINTER. BY LATE NOVEMBER it seemed as though the world had always been white. Mr. Richards helped Daniel shovel the long paths that led to the spring-house, the well, the barn and outbuildings. Every few days a warm sun stripped the snow from the trees and set the icicles round the eaves dripping and rattling to the ground. But following this there would be a night's freezing, and then the sky would grow gray and pregnant again with snow.

"It's healthy, a snowy winter," Sarah remarked often as she looked from the kitchen windows. "'A green Christmas ay makes a white kirkyard,' as Mother used to say."

There was indeed a subtle lightening of the family mood, due to the soft transfiguring influence of the snow. Even Daniel's serious face relaxed during the first weeks of it. In the evenings, instead of the long theological discussions with Mr. Richards ("But how do you interpret the sixth verse of the Epistle of Jude?" or "How do you reconcile Revelations 20, verse 5, with the Catechism, 'The souls of believers . . . do immediately pass into glory?'")—instead of this, Daniel propounded quaint riddles as he whittled on a small stick, or perhaps invented new games in which even the older girls condescended to join. There was parched corn, too, of an evening, prepared in the big iron skillet, and presented later to the family in a bowl, seasoned with salt and butter. Sometimes as they sat warm and secure around the big open-grate fire, a faint, pure metallic jingle came from the road. Every one stopped to listen and comment.

"That'll be Billy Brown on his way to the Hendersons' to see Matilda."

"It's not clear enough for his bells!"

"Yes, it is. I can tell them. He has a string the whole way round each horse. He paid a pretty price for them, too."

"Did he get them at Galloway's?"

"Not him. He bought them in Pittsburg, so they were telling me last Sunday. It looks as if he and Matilda were getting pretty thick."

"Well," said Sarah, "if Matilda gets him, she'll sit down in a butter keg. The Browns are well fixed."

"There are some girls prefer education to money," Betsy put in primly. Then, fearing she had given her secret away, she rose quickly and went to the cellar for more apples.

As a matter of fact, Betsy had been for some time preserving a studied silence. The first heated flutterings of her heart at the proximity to James Richards had given way to a deep and steady passion which at times threatened to consume her. She watched his every movement. The features of his face were as clear to her in the darkness as in the light. Betsy suffered in her longing, and her plump face grew thinner that winter.

Liza Jane, on the other hand, was blooming like a retarded flower. She had taken to wearing her hair in a loose net at the nape of her neck, even allowing it to lie softly around the sides of her face. Her cheeks had more colour now, and something of sharpness had gone from her voice. She had a keen wit, and it was apparent that James Richards enjoyed it. There was always conversation flowing back and forth between them. Liza Jane's mind was of the same texture as her father's, and the young man spoke to her as to an interesting equal.

Betsy had neither wit nor wisdom. She had only her pretty plump body created for love, and her heart on fire with it. Once as she was dusting the bookcase, a



tiny rose and gilt volume tumbled out. She snatched it up eagerly. It was "Essays on Various Subjects, Principally Designed for Young Ladies," by Hannah More. She carried it off in her apron pocket and later when she was alone re-read it avidly. The essay on Romantic Connections did not seem to fit her case, but under the heading of Thoughts on Conversation her eyes fell upon these lines, which seemed written for her alone:

How easily and effectually may a well-bred woman promote the most useful and elegant conversation, almost without speaking a word! for the modes of speech are scarcely more variable than the modes of silence. . . . A woman, in a company where she has the least influence, may promote any subject by a profound and invariable attention, which shows that she is pleased with it, and by an illuminated countenance, which proves she understands it. This obliging attention is the most flattering encouragement in the world to men of sense and letters. . . .

Betsy clasped the small book to her heart. Here, then, was the course for her to pursue. Even if Liza Jane could talk to him, he could not help being more stirred by her "illuminated countenance" as she listened in silence. Didn't the book practically say so?

From that time on, Betsy had sat each evening as near to her idol as possible, rarely speaking, but lifting frequently to him a face with a fixed expression of what she believed to be illumination. One night Jeannie, after watching her for some moments, giggled.

"Betsy, what have you got the corners of your mouth all pursed up for? You look so funny!"

Betsy gave her a look far from illuminated, and coloured furiously. Jeannie was such a blundering child.

One night as they sat by the fire a sound of bells came faintly from the road, then louder and nearer. Jeannie rushed to the window and peered out between her hands.

"It's a sleigh coming up the lane!" she announced.

"Who could that be?" Sarah exclaimed, rising at once to sweep the hearth and tidy up the table.

"Bring the rocker out of the parlour, girls; and fetch me a clean apron, Jeannie, out of the drawer there."

Daniel got up, too, threw a shawl from the kitchen hooks around him and went out on the back porch. The sleigh had stopped at the hitching-post, and a large figure was coming towards the house.

"Good-evenin', Dan'l." It was Big Bob Forsythe.

"Well, well, Robert! Come in. Come in!"

There was the sound of tremendous stamping and shaking on the back porch, for a light snow was falling again; then Big Bob entered the sitting-room, his face, as usual, beaming with friendliness. Everybody beamed in response. A visit from Big Bob was always a treat.

When he was seated in the best rocker, a large apple in his hands and his feet extended towards the grate, he wheezed with satisfaction.

"Now, ain't this nice, though! Wisht I could have fetched the missus an' Terese along, but they've both got colds. Fact of the matter is, I come on a little matter of business."

He took a large bite of apple and tweaked Jeannie's curls.

"We're always glad to see you, Mr. Forsythe, whatever your errand," said Sarah. Then she drew a quick breath, remembering that Big Bob had not been inside the house since the fateful night of the trial over three months ago.

But Big Bob apparently had not thought of it. He was looking admiringly at Betsy and Liza Jane.

"I declare, girls, you get better lookin' every time I see you. Mr. Richards, did they have as fine girls as these where you come from?"

"If they did, I never saw them," James Richards replied with vigour.

Betsy and Liza Jane did not look at each other; but

each, flushing as though at a personal compliment, picked up her knitting.

"Well, now, to get this business part settled," Big Bob went on. "I was in New Salem t'other day in Galloway's, an' I seen a man in the back of the store I thought was my cousin from over in Indiana County, so I goes up to him; an' here it turns out to be Mr. McFarland, the singin' teacher—the one with the fiddle, you know. Funny thing was, he thought I was somebody he knowed in Blairsville till I got right up on him. It was the day of the big snow, an' the store was sort of darkish——"

Big Bob broke off and began to chuckle. Jeannie, knowing the symptoms, hitched her chair nearer delightedly.

"Now, that jist makes me think of a story my pap used to tell 'bout two Irishmen that met each other one foggy night. They each thought they knowed the other, an' when they came face to face they found they was *both* mistaken. The one old codger, he scratched his head, an' he says, says he: 'Now, ain't that funny! I thought it was you, an' you thought it was me; an', begob, it's *nayther* of us!'"

When the full laughter had subsided, Big Bob resumed his apple and his business.

"Well, the singin' teacher an' me, we got talkin', an' he told me he'd like another class. 'Pears like he's got one out at Number 10, an' one in New Salem, an' one at Shields' school, an' two more towards Greensburg; but he'd like one more to fill up his extry night. So I told him I'd make a canvass of the neighbourhood here an' see what I could do. Him havin' the fiddle, you see, would be a big advantage over the ones we've been havin' these last years. What's your opinion, Dan'l?"

"What's his charge?" Daniel asked.

"A dollar a family for eight nights. With, say, sixteen families, that would give him two dollars a night.

Seems a little high to me, for he has no expenses, always puts up with some one in the district; but they say he's awful handy with the fiddle."

There was a little silence. Never since she could remember had ready cash been so scarce, Sarah was thinking. Mr. Richards' board money was absolutely all they had, five dollars a month. It was all she had the heart to charge him. Daniel's face was serious now, and Big Bob's embarrassed, as the pause grew appreciable. Then Mr. Richards spoke.

"I suppose I would be included in the family here?" he asked.

"Why, sure!" said Big Bob. "Sure you would!"

"Then," the young man went on, "I should like to subscribe for the family, if I may. The opportunity of the singing school will be worth the dollar to me alone, and of course it will be a pleasure to escort the girls, Mrs. McDowell, if you will entrust them to me."

Daniel demurred a little, but Mr. Richards was so charmingly eager, that there seemed to be no occasion for wounded pride. It was finally settled, and the dollar paid over.

Big Bob was jubilant. "I reckon I'll be droppin' in at the affair myself, since I'll have to take Terese. It's all 'bout as good as settled now, for I hain't much doubt we can get the sixteen families. Too bad Dave ain't home for it. He al'ays enjoyed a singin'. How's he gettin' along, Mrs. McDowell?"

Sarah's face kindled. "Why, first rate! Jeannie, hand me that last letter you got from David. It's on the end of the mantel. Here's what he says:

"M—m. 'I am getting on fine. I like my studies, and Dr. Donaldson told me I would have some good marks to show the folks at the end of the term. In the cabin I do most of the cooking, and John does the cleaning up.' That's his cabin mate. 'We have a debate next week on

*"Resolved, That the pen is mightier than the sword."* I'm on the pen side and I'm saying what Father told us about Lincoln's proclamation doing more to free the slaves than all the fighting. Please ask Mother if she thinks John and I would be smart enough to make doughnuts. If so to send us a recipe. We can buy lard here for very little. Yes, I've kept my socks darned. Not as well as Liza Jane can do it, but fair enough. We've had deep snow for two weeks now, and sleighing right over the tops of the fences where the drifts are the deepest. I guess this is all at this time, from David."

Big Bob had given closest attention. There was a tender light in his eyes.

"Well, now, ain't that wonderful! Dave writin' a long letter like that. I never wrote a letter in my life. No, sir. Wouldn't know how to begin. Though they do say once you get the knack of it it's as easy as skinnin' moles. My! I al'ays thought an awful sight of Dave. Debatin', too, ain't he? He's a smart lad. It was nice to hear that letter now, that's a fact. Well, I reckon I'd better be headin' towards home. I'll have to send word to you later whether the singin' school will be Friday or Saturday nights."

"Not Saturday, Robert," Daniel spoke up quickly. "That would have my strong disapproval. On a Saturday night each family should be gathered round its own fireside preparing their minds for the Sabbath day."

Big Bob scratched his head as he rose. "Well, now, I hadn't thought of that; but if that's the way you feel, Dan'l, I'll stick out hard for Friday. 'Tany rate I'll let you know soon. An' come over, all of you, now, to see us."

When he had gone, the subject of the singing school was too exciting to drop. Daniel himself began to hunt among his books in the cupboard for the old "Carmina Sacra" music books, the ones used each winter.



"You've hardly touched the melodeon this winter, Jeannie. You folks had better be practising up a little."

Jeannie, with her usual quickness of action, jumped up from her chair and ran to the small instrument in the corner with its yellowed keys. She seemed to be the only one able to coax any music from it. She looked around now roguishly.

"I'll sing you a song," she said. And in her soft contralto, rich for a young voice, she began:

*"Oh, where have you been, Billy boy, Billy boy,  
Oh, where have you been, charming Billy?  
I've been to seek a wife,  
She's the joy of my life,  
She's a young thing and cannot leave her mother."*

Sarah, looking across smilingly at Mr. Richards, suddenly let the knitting fall from her fingers. The young man's face was self-conscious and coloured with embarrassment. For the first time he looked boyishly ill at ease. Jeannie's voice, into which she had somehow put a note of coquetry, went on:

*"Did she ask you to come in, Billy boy, Billy boy,  
Did she ask you to come in, charming Billy?  
Yes, she asked me to come in,  
She has a dimple in her chin,  
She's a young thing and cannot leave her mother."*

*"Did she set for you a chair, Billy boy, Billy boy,  
Did she set for you a chair, charming Billy?  
Yes, she set for me a chair,  
She has ringlets in her hair,  
She's a young thing and cannot leave her mother."*

"Why don't the rest of you sing?" Jeannie called over her shoulder.



Daniel raised his voice at once, and in a moment they were all chanting:

*"Can she bake a cherry pie, Billy boy, Billy boy,  
Can she bake a cherry pie, charming Billy?"*

But Sarah had thoughts of her own to think. "She's a young thing and cannot leave her mother," chorused the family, while the mother of the young thing told herself she was full of foolish imaginings.

Thanks to Big Bob's diplomacy, the Painter Hollow singing school was set for Friday night. All that day Liza Jane and Betsy were in a tremor of preparation. Their best dresses—last winter's, of course—were dark merinos with only too many signs of wear.

"It does seem past all bearing that this winter of all years we can't buy one new thing, doesn't it, Liza Jane?"

Liza Jane, with her dress on the ironing-board and a basin of water beside her, was zealously dabbing at small grease spots. The handle of a clothes-brush was in her mouth, and so she did not reply.

"The Henderson girls will be there full sail with new dresses and bonnets, too, I'll be bound. Father can talk all he likes about the ornaments of a quiet spirit, but clothes *do* make such a difference. I've never wanted a new dress in my whole life as much as I want one this winter, and it does seem hard——"

Liza Jane took the clothes-brush handle from her mouth and peered more closely at her dress.

"Listen," she said. "You go fetch me down your merino and I'll sponge it, too, like I've done mine. Look how it freshens it up. You know where we both got these grease spots? It was over at Granny McCleester's quiltin', this fall a year. You mind we had to warm ourselves at the kitchen stove, and she was fryin' doughnuts at the time. Fetch me your dress down."

Sarah had overheard the conversation, and her mother-heart ached for the girls. It was something to go to singing school at any time, but to go in the company of the handsomest young man in the countryside was enough to make the girls wish for new dresses. And they needed them so. She sighed. The loss of the wheat cut into their lives at a dozen points. No one knew the bitter little economies she practised daily.

She went slowly upstairs now, thinking of another legacy she had from her mother, aside from the gold pieces that were keeping David at Eldersridge. It was a box of laces and ribbons with a cameo pin and a gold chain. They were precious to her as they had been precious to her mother, and she had been keeping them for the girls' weddings. Her brow was knit anxiously now as she drew out the small shoe-box from the bureau drawer and fingered the bits in her hand. Her mother had brought the jewellery from Scotland, and had kept it safe through all the hard years of her frontier life. The one lace collar she had worn when she was married at the fort the night the Indians burned Hannahstown. She had seen her first-born baby snatched from her arms and killed against a fence post by the Indians in the West. She had made a little coffin with her own hands for another baby, while her husband was off on an Indian raid. Those days were long ago, but the stories she had heard of them came back to Sarah as she stood there. Her mother's life had been a hard one most of its long span of nearly a century. And yet—her eyes fell upon her third legacy lying upon the bureau top. It was a thick brown book worn by much use. It always fell open of itself at the same pages, where some words were underlined: "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place. . . ."

Sarah closed the bureau drawer and carried the shoe-box downstairs. It was no time now to be living in the

past. She tried to assume a casual air to the girls, but her eyes belied it.

"I was just thinking about these old laces of Mother's. I believe a touch of them would brighten up your dresses. Now, for instance, this collar. . . ."

At the end of an hour it was all settled. Betsy was to wear the wide lace collar and the cameo, and Liza Jane the Dundee strip pinned with a brooch and the gold chain. They tried the dresses on, freshly pressed with their new ornaments. They ran to the small mirror, exclaiming delightedly. Even Liza Jane's face was flushed with pleasure.

"Of course," Sarah admonished, "I wouldn't want you to wear them unless it was on a real *occasion* like singing school. And, girls, do be careful. Feel often to see if your pins are fastened and all."

Betsy was all but weeping in her delight.

"Why, Mother, it's like a miracle. It just makes the dresses look *new*. I don't think I ever was so pleased over anything!"

Sarah was fingering through the box.

"I want Jeannie to have something, too. I couldn't trust her with the chain or the brooches, and of course her plaid flannel is bright to start with. Here's the thing. I'll let her wear this black velvet band in her hair. It will be a change, and she'll feel sort of dressed up."

When they were all ready that evening, Daniel and Sarah surveyed their daughters carefully. In their refurbished dresses and bright shawls and bonnets, the older girls made, to their parents' eyes, a really elegant spectacle. But it was upon Jeannie, after all, that their eyes dwelt longest. She had been the first one ready, as usual, though her mother had to re-button her dress straight. The bright flannel matched the red in her cheeks, and her eyes were dancing with eagerness. But

the black band in her hair had worked like an alchemy upon Jeannie. In looks, at least now, she was a young lady.

Mr. Richards, the second one down, looking very tall and handsome in his Sunday suit and flowing tie, stopped at sight of Jeannie.

"Am I nice?" she asked with a twinkle.

"*Jeannie!*" her mother admonished.

"Well, I just asked to be sure. He looked sort of doubtful."

And for once James Richards seemed to find no words at his command. He was saved by the entrance of the other girls.

There was a little flurry then to be sure they had the singing books and the candles.

"I've wrapped up eight good long ones," Sarah said, as Mr. Richards took the package. "Be sure to sort of keep an eye round the wall as the evening goes on, and see that all the candles are straight. I'm that afraid of fire!"

"We'll take care!"

"Well, sing out now, and do your best," Daniel called after them.

Mr. Richards had been firm about getting out the small one-horse sled, in spite of the girls' insistence that they always had walked other winters. They were pleased, none the less, when they found the small sled at the head of the lane, plentifully covered with clean straw and horse blankets. There was a chain of bells around old Nell, too.

"My, ain't we going in style?" Betsy whispered to Liza Jane.

Mr. Richards helped them in, and tucked the blankets cosily around them. There was the discordant jar of the bells as the start was made, and then the rhythmic jingle-jangle-jingle as old Nell settled to a steady pace.

It was moonlight, and the white world held magic. The older girls had rarely known such happiness.

Since Mr. Richards was the teacher and had the key, it was incumbent upon him to have the schoolhouse open and warm when the crowd arrived; so he hurried old Nell along, and the drive ended all too quickly.

"Stay in the sled, girls, and keep warm while I open the door and make a light. Then I'll come back and help you out."

He tied the horse to the fence, and then started towards the door. Jeannie suddenly threw aside her blanket and jumped from the sled.

"I'll come, too, and help you with the candles," she said, scrambling through the snow.

Liza Jane and Betsy, who both secretly enjoyed the experience of being assisted by Mr. Richards' strong arm, sat still as they were bidden.

"Jeannie's the little cutty, now, ain't she? She'll never grow up, I doubt," Liza Jane said under her breath.

Mr. Richards opened the great door and he and Jeannie stepped into the darkness. Jeannie took the package of candles and fumbled with the string. She felt Mr. Richards' face very near her own. It almost seemed as though his cheek lay for a moment against her curls.

"Jeannie," he whispered, "will you sit on the seat with me going home and look at the stars?"

"Why, yes," Jeannie said. "I'd like to."

Their hands met over the candles, and for a long second neither moved. In the strangeness of it Jeannie trembled. Then Mr. Richards struck a match, and everything was real again.

Jeannie set the lighted candles in the wedge-shaped wooden holders which were driven into cracks in the logs along the sides of the room. Mr. Richards stirred the fire in the big pot-bellied stove to a bright blaze and

then hurried out again to the sled. He seemed strangely elated.

"Will the ladies condescend to enter the humble building awaiting them?"

While the girls cried out with surprise and delight he carried each of them from the sled to the school steps, laughing as he did so. And Liza Jane and Betsy each felt heaven opening as he clasped her in his arms.

In a few moments, there was the quick sound of bells from the main road, then more bells. The whole air was merrily astir with them. Soon there was stamping of heavy boots on the doorsteps, shouts from the men, and squeals from the girls; the opening of the great door, letting in waves of frosty air; exclamations, and laughter, and the smell of melted snow on the sides of the big stove. The evening had really begun.

One of the first to arrive was Granny McCleester. Enveloped in several thick shawls and a knitted hood, she made the entrance with difficulty, helped on either side by her youngest son, Henry, and his wife, Prudence. Granny sputtered and sniffed with the cold as she progressed slowly to a chair set for her beside the stove. The girls already there were smiling their welcome. Everybody loved Granny. Her heart was as big as her huge body. And though she belonged to the generation of their mothers or grandmothers, she was in a peculiar way their own, for her sympathies were always with the "young uns."

Henry leaned over her anxiously.

"You ain't chilled, Mother."

"Oh, haud your wheesht, Hendry! I'm fine. It's a bonny night, an' I rode here like a queen. . . . Do you ken what we done? I'm gettin' ower stiff to sit on the straw, so I says to Hendry here, 'Fetch out the kitchen chair an' put an old suggan on it, an' I'll sit on that in



the back of the sled and hold steady by hookin' the end of me cane over the driver's seat! ' An' it worked fine. Weary on them that has no contrivance, say I!"

The girls gathered closer, eager to help Granny off with her wraps. Liza Jane untied her bonnet strings. As she removed her hood, Granny passed her hands over her thin gray hair.

"I doubt my hair's all struggle! Oh, well, it'll no be me the young blades'll be lookin' at the night. An' mind you one thing, girls, I'm not leavin' this school-house till I see what beau each of you gets! Prudence here, the little hussy, says that's all I come for!"

She glanced affectionately at her daughter-in-law. "But that ain't so. It's the fiddle brings me. If I can't hear the pipes themselves, give me a fiddle. But, oh, you never heard music if you never heard my brother Tammias givin' a skirl on the pipes! My, what a wind was in yon crittur! He could blaw 'The Campbells Are Comin'' clean round the farm wi'oot stoppin'. Is this the young professor?" she ended suddenly as Mr. Richards' head appeared above the group.

He came forward, smiling, and shook hands. "We're glad to have you here to-night, Mrs. McCleester."

"Oh, aye, you couldn't hold me away from a singin'. I'll get to the back now, though, an' leave the front seats for them that has voices."

As she rose she beckoned the little group of girls closer to her. "Yon's the brawest laddie I've seen since I was young mesel'. Now, see you set your caps for him. Mind ye, a man's a handy thing to have"—Granny's mouth twisted at one corner, and one eyelid flickered—"about the barn!"

The door opened with a rush, and the real crowd began to pour in. Big Bob had brought Terese, and also Mr. McFarland. There was a little falling back before him and his fiddle, for he carried himself with authority.

He walked now quickly to the front of the platform and began tuning his violin.

Jeannie, meanwhile, had been busy receiving candles from the newcomers, and adding them to those already set in their sockets. She drew Terese to her aid.

"I never mind a time when folks brought as many candles as to-night. Isn't it fun?"

"It's most wonderful," Terese answered, "if only——" But Jeannie didn't hear.

Mr. McFarland picked up a ruler and rapped smartly on the window-sill. There was a general settling of the girls along the one side and the men upon the other. Those lads who were still outside came stamping in and took their places. There was a subdued thumping of books as they were arranged upon the desks; then Mr. McFarland announced in a strong voice: "Page 7. Page 7 in the singin' books.

*' Fair as the morning, bright as the day,  
Visions of beauty tarry for ay.'*

"I'll play the tune through first."

He raised his violin, and with a sweeping motion which included his head, his right arm and his right foot, he marked the time emphatically as he played.

"Now, then, come on, everybody! Sing out!"

The voices rose at first a bit hesitantly, then, gaining power, filled the schoolhouse. There was no attempt at instruction upon the part of the leader. He was "teacher" by courtesy only. His business was to play the fiddle and raise the tunes with his strong voice. Everybody came to sing, and everybody sang. There was an amazing harmony about it all, and something more. There was uplift, and a surcease from repression. Bashful lads from farms far back in the hills, who were bound by work too heavy for their young shoulders, suddenly, under cover

of the volume of sound, let out their voices and felt a tightness leave their hearts. Girls, who were trying with inept fingers to piece together the poorly-fitted puzzle of their meagre lives, suddenly forgot themselves and felt light and happy. Expression, that rarest quality of their experience, was given to them now in full measure. So they lifted their voices. So they sang.

In the middle of the evening Mr McFarland laid down his violin on the front desk and smiled.

"That was great singin'!" he said. "I'm here to tell you that none of my other classes can come up to this one! Now we'll have fifteen minutes' intermission."

There was at once a bedlam of sounds. The young men, chaffering and laughing, all went outside, with many openings and closings of the heavy door. The girls all gathered around the stove to gossip and get a better view of one another's clothes. All evening Liza Jane and Betsy had been superbly conscious of the looks cast in their direction. Even the Henderson girls in their new merino dresses did not look so elegant and "different" as they themselves. At intermission they were a pretty centre of interest. Mr. Richards had gone outside along with the other men, so the young ladies were free to discuss him.

"Is he stuck up, Betsy, or is he nice and common at home?"

"Oh, he's always pleasant and agreeable," Betsy said primly.

"Is it true he was in the War? And they say he's never licked anybody in school yet. They just do whatever he says. It's amazin'."

"And he'll be a full-fledged preacher by next year. My, he's handsome, for sure. Does he talk much, Liza Jane, in the evenings?"

"Of course. But it's mostly with Father on theology." Liza Jane was sampling a sweet cup of triumph. Though

it came late, she was feeling the thrill of feminine importance. She had been forced by circumstances to grow up too soon. She had resigned herself to spinsterhood early. And now, suddenly, with her hair soft about her temples and her cheeks young and rosy, she was being admired and envied by the other girls because of her close contact with the man they would all give their eyes for!

Betsy was already thinking about the trip home. Compared to Mr. Richards, the other farm lads, even Billy Brown with his new cutter and sleigh bells, seemed uncouth. Every other year at singing school, something inside her had hurt with an unbearable pain when the other girls started home with their beaux. But not to-night! Not to-night!

Suddenly a long-drawn rasping note on the violin warned them that intermission was over. There was more stamping of snow outside, noise and confusion of settling, and then once again the free burst of voices, the release of song.

When it was over at last, every one stirred slowly. The event towards which the whole evening moved was yet to come. This was the lining up in a double row of all the young men. Through this male avenue the girls passed to the door, with as much pretence at composure as each could muster. If a masculine elbow was crooked as she passed by, she accepted it (usually) and swept on to the owner's sleigh or sled.

The girls twittered and whispered together as they put on their wraps. It would never do to be ready too soon. Jeannie, however, was an exception. She hurriedly caught up her bonnet and shawl and slipped to the front of the room, where Big Bob was talking to Mr. Richards. With a little glance behind her she saw that the boys had not yet begun to line up. Big Bob was clapping the young man's shoulder.

"Naw, naw, now, it won't be a bit of trouble. You git on out there an' wait for your girl like the rest of 'em. I'll cover the fire an' lock up. You can get the key from me on Sabbath. Now go 'long with you!"

Jeannie laid a timid hand on Mr. Richards' arm. She felt his start as he saw her.

"Mr. Richards," she whispered, "could I go on out and get in the sled? I'm afraid Ben Brown's going to ask to take me home—he's been looking at me all evening—and I don't want to go with him."

Mr. Richards bent towards her, smiling into her eyes.

"But if I asked you first, Jeannie?"

"I'm afraid to chance it. I'd rather slip out now when no one sees me. Besides, there's three of us. You couldn't watch out for us all down the line."

"All right, Jeannie, only don't forget you're riding home on the seat with me!"

"I won't," she said, and was gone in a second. She slid through the group at the door and was free. Once outside she giggled delightedly as she made straight for the sled. Ben Brown was Billy's younger brother. He was a short, heavy youth with pale blue eyes and a shock of light hair. He had been casting tentative glances at Jeannie for some time. To-night it was too definite to disregard. He had the old sleigh for his own now since Billy had the new cutter, so was fully equipped to get a girl. Without knowing why, Jeannie had a strong feeling that she did not want to be alone with Ben Brown. She scrambled now through a snowdrift and was at last safe on the seat. She laughed again with pleasure when she realised her vantage point. From where she sat she had a perfect view of the open door with its double line of young men, extending clear back to the stove. She saw Mr. Richards taking his place among the rest. They were all laughing, while the girls hung back.

Suddenly down the line came Matilda Henderson. She



didn't need to wait. She was sure of her escort. Billy Brown's elbow crooked violently at her side. She grasped his arm, and out they came. He picked her up and carried her to the sleigh. Jeannie, forgetful of the line, watched them fascinated. Billy kissed her as he set her in the sleigh, and Matilda did not cry out. Something about that kiss, quietly given and received, stirred Jeannie to new imaginings.

But in a moment her eyes were back upon the line. Just in time, too. For down came Liza Jane and Betsy almost together. They were laughing too, and looking strangely pretty. Mr. Richards stepped out with a bow and smile and offered an arm to each. They swept towards the door in a kind of triumph. Jeannie sensed that now the line would seem rather dull to those left behind.

The girls were expostulating prettily upon the steps, but Mr. Richards would not be dissuaded. Liza Jane first and then Betsy, he carried to the sled. And there were many watching, too, from the door! He untied old Nell, and took his place on the seat, tucking the blanket carefully about Jeannie.

"Mr. Forsythe told us you'd come on out, Jeannie, or we'd have been hunting you yet, I suppose," Betsy said. "Oh, isn't it a pretty night!"

"It just couldn't be finer," Mr. Richards said heartily.

He did not urge old Nell, going back. The moon was large and white above the woods, and the stars were moving swiftly across the frosty sky. The snowy fields stretched away on every side with a mysterious beauty. Mr. Richards moved close to Jeannie.

"Now if you'll look over there—right above the big oak, rather to the south and east you'll see . . ."

The girls in the sled behind, hugging to their hearts the happiness of the evening and gossiping quietly about their friends, paid no particular attention to the fact that



Mr. Richards had put his arm around Jeannie to support her while she watched the stars. Jeannie herself, in her zeal to locate Orion, was scarcely conscious of it. But Mr. Richards was conscious of it. So much so, that he lay awake a long time that night, pondering.

With the coming on of December, the lightness of spirit which the first snow had brought disappeared from the McDowell household. The first signs of the change were frequent long-drawn sighs from Daniel. His countenance was settled in a deep melancholy. He sat for longer intervals during the day reading his Bible. Sarah, too, looked grave, and the older girls wore a self-conscious sobriety of mien. Jeannie could hear them at night in long, mournful conversations. She was puzzled, just as she was each June and each December, until she remembered. It was nearing the semi-annual Communion season, and David was still outside the fold of grace.

In his nightly prayers Daniel began to make his petitions more pointed:

"And oh, wilt Thou touch the heart of that one so dear to us, that one for whom our prayers ascend unceasingly. Oh, wilt Thou rouse him to the fact that the time is short, that death comes like a thief in the night! Oh, give him no rest or peace of mind until he has made his peace with God."

After such a prayer, Sarah and the older girls rose from their knees, wiping their eyes, and Jeannie felt miserably uncomfortable.

Daniel had written already to Dr. Donaldson, begging him to talk with David. He had also written a long letter to David himself. On a never to be forgotten Saturday, Daniel and Mr. Richards returned from New Salem with two letters from Eldersridge. The one from Pater Donaldson was opened first. It said briefly that he had talked with David and found him thoughtful beyond his years, but felt it would be a mistake to urge him further;

the final decision must be entirely his own. Daniel sighed heavily and then opened David's letter:

DEAR FATHER:

I have been giving thought to the matter you mention. I have had a talk with Dr. Donaldson too, and I've decided to meet the Session before this coming Communion. The Academy lets out for Christmas vacation on the 18th, if you can come for me. I hope you are well at home. The weather is still cold here and plenty of snow. Tell Mother the dough-nuts turned out pretty good.

Your son,

DAVID.

Daniel passed the two letters over to Sarah, who hovered anxiously near, then took out his red handkerchief and blew his nose loudly.

"Thank God!" he said. "Thank God."

The 18th fell on a Friday. The family rose in the clouds of the morning to give Daniel a good start on his journey. Since there was still so much snow, he drove the light sleigh. Sarah had hot bricks wrapped in newspapers to put about his feet.

"Heat them up again on David's stove before you start back," she admonished; "and be sure, both of you, to keep your ears well covered. It'll be colder coming home facing the wind. Well, safe journey!"

The girls were very busy that day. Once again through their quiet routine a thread of excitement ran. David was coming home for the first time since he had left in October; there would be church Saturday afternoon leading up to the great event of Communion on the Sabbath, and David would then be a member with the rest. They sang no light songs, however, as they worked. The tunes they raised were the mournful ones common to the Communion season. It was a time of self-searching, of prostration before a just God who dealt out

punishments as well as blessings. It was a time to force the mind to contemplate even the ghastly prospect of hell itself.

So Liza Jane and Betsy boiled a ham, beat up a pound cake, and rolled out cookies, trying hard to prove their souls, while the pleasant secularity of their work beguiled them.

"I wonder who else will join this time," Betsy said, as she measured a spoonful of saleratus. "I'm so anxious about Billy Brown. Mebbe Matilda can influence him. Now that David's come to a decision, we ought to remember Billy in our prayers. Liza Jane, do you s'pose that ham's done by now? We don't want it to fall to pieces."

Jeannie burst in at the door shortly after four o'clock, her cheeks scarlet. To her the matter of David's return took precedence over everything else.

"What time do you s'pose they'll get here? Oh, I can't wait! Just think! It's been nearly three months. Do you s'pose they'll get here by supper time, Liza Jane?"

"We're hoping so. Father left so early, they ought to get a good start back. But it's a long cold drive. They might have to stop somewhere to get warmed. Would—would you care for a cookie, Mr. Richards?"

Mr. Richards ate his cakes thoughtfully, watching Jeannie as he did so. She had never seemed so happily alive, from the top of her shining brown hair to the tips of her quick-moving feet, as now, when talking of David's coming. He had given up trying to be casual to himself about the beauty of her slim body in its neat-fitting flannel dress, the young breasts like faintly swelling buds, below. The dancing light in her eyes, her quick smile, all the impetuous grace of her—this was Jeannie, and he knew at last that she had entered his heart to stay.

She was appealing now to Sarah, who had just entered the kitchen.

"Mother, I want to do something special for David, all myself. Can't I bake a cherry pie, Mother? It's his favourite. I could use canned cherries, and it wouldn't take a minute. The stove oven here is hot anyhow. Please, Mother!"

It was never easy to deny Jeannie. Sarah finally agreed, though the older girls raised their noses a trifle, and Liza Jane said there was no need of pie when they had cake and cookies already made.

"You'd think we were getting ready for a funeral, the amount of baking we're doing."

"Or a wedding," Betsy added shyly, with a side glance at Mr. Richards.

She and Liza Jane removed their aprons and went into the sitting-room to knit for a few minutes, each secretly hoping Mr. Richards would follow them. But he remained in the kitchen. Her mother, too, watched Jeannie, smilingly.

"She's the best cook of all of us," she said, "when she puts her mind to it."

In a remarkably short time Jeannie had her pie in the pan, and was holding it aloft.

"Look, Mr. Richards! I'll show you the special family crimp. My great-grandmother did it first and it's been passed down. See, like this!"

Jeannie brought the outer edges of her pastry together with a practiced thumb, then rolled and pressed until a fluted border ran around the pan. Suddenly she set it down and clapped her floury hands together. She looked up at Mr. Richards with happy eyes that hardly saw him.

"Oh, now I'll have Davy to look at the stars with! And I can show him all my new ones!"

Mr. Richards, feeling as though something had struck him a blow in the pit of his stomach, turned and went slowly up to his room.

The travellers indeed made good time. It was barely

seven when the sleigh was heard coming up the lane. The family had waited supper, and now Sarah hurried nervously between the table and the stove. She had put a white cloth on to-night in David's honour, and an extra dish of jelly. This, with Jeannie's pie, gave the table quite a festive look. Her hands trembled a little as she heard the heavy stamping on the porch. Her boy. . . . The door opened, and David was home again.

They all shook hands, but Jeannie clung to him openly, following him wherever he went. He had a present for her, too, an engraving of "Christ Blessing Little Children." He had bought it from a pedlar, he explained. Jeannie was enraptured, and the family scrutinised it with interest.

While they sat at supper they were all conscious of a change in David. He held his head higher now, and the heavy, brooding look had lifted from his eyes. He talked to Mr. Richards without undue embarrassment, and answered all Daniel's questions easily. But there was about him, too, a new seriousness.

It was to Jeannie that he revealed his heart, as they went out to their familiar place at the orchard fence before time for family prayers.

"I've learned a lot of new stars, Davy. I'll teach you."

"Jeannie!"

"Yes, Davy."

"Wasn't it awful about Mag McKinstrie?"

"Yes. Did Mother write you?"

"Yes. Jeannie, I can't believe that God let her die that way as a punishment for—for what she had done. And yet that's what everybody will think. Father and Mother do."

"I know. Why don't you think so, Davy?"

"Because, even granting her lies and all the rest of it, that doesn't seem fair. I think she died because old McKinstrie was too dumb to get a doctor there in time."

"Oh, David!"

"And Jeannie, listen. Do you know, I don't believe in hell any more. Not the real fire and brimstone place!"

"Oh, *Davy!*"

"Well, I don't. But don't tell the rest. It doesn't do any good to argue. Only I have to talk to somebody. I hope they don't ask me anything about that in the Session to-morrow."

"Oh, I'm glad you're joining, David."

"Can you keep a secret?"

"I'll try."

"I'm just joining to please Father and Mother. I haven't had any conversion the way they think."

Jeannie leaned against him speechless. David's head was raised to the profundity of the heavens.

"One night last summer as I came home from camp meeting——" He stopped. Even to Jeannie it was impossible to put into words the height and depth of that experience.

"I just began to wonder if a lot of folks weren't on the wrong track somehow," he ended quietly.

Jeannie pressed closer. Without sensing at all the tremendous questionings in David's mind, she had applied his words to herself.

"Oh, I'm sure *I* must be all wrong somehow. You know, at the Communion table Mother and the girls always cry? Well, I put my handkerchief up to my eyes like they do, and I try to think of my sins and—and of Calvary, but—Oh, *Davy!*" Her voice trembled over the magnitude of her confession. "I never can make one tear come."

David gave her a convulsive hug.

"Why try to?" he said sharply. "Why *should* you cry?"

"You don't think I'm wicked then?"

"You know what I think of you," he said brusquely.

"Say, we'd better be getting on in."

Saturday was an unreal day. Even at breakfast time all



ordinary conversation was submerged in the general air of solemnity. Daniel's morning prayer was longer than usual. There was an element of thanksgiving in it, but he wrestled still with the Calvinistic burden of doom. The family ate an early lunch and were well on their way to Confluence by one o'clock. The preparatory service was at two. Mr. Richards had been asked to assist Dr. McFeeters, and so he went directly to the pulpit. It was he who read the Scriptures and offered the prayer. He seemed in the pulpit taller and more strikingly handsome than at other times. There was about him, too, a singular dignity and sincerity that lifted him far above self-consciousness.

Jeannie, watching him, her grey eyes wide, felt an unaccountable tremor steal over her. For the first time she was acutely aware of his charm. And with the awareness came a disturbing thought. The winter was half gone, and he would never teach again in Painter Hollow!

At the close of the service came the solemn rite of distributing the "tokens," small disks of beaten metal which Daniel, as senior member of the Session, kept in a shabby little brown bag locked in the parlour bookcase at home. He and Mr. Henderson now stood at either door, as the people passed out, giving one to each church member. On the morrow, only those possessing tokens were supposed to commune. Not a word was spoken as the congregation filed past, the two Elders with their graven faces standing like gatekeepers of heaven doling out to humble pilgrims the tickets of admission.

Daniel put carefully in his pocket the bag of unused tokens, and then, along with Dr. McFeeters and the other Elders, went down to one of the small rooms at either side of the "basement," as the first floor of the church was known. Those wishing to meet the Session went into the other small room to await their turn. David, embarrassed, anxious, uncomfortable, went slowly down the

stairs after he had seen the last of the Elders disappear, and opened the door of the antechamber. Then he shut it quickly, and remained standing with his back against it. There was only one other person in the room. It was Terese. At sight of him, she sprang up and they stood facing each other, hearts beating, eyes taking their hungry fill.

"Davy!" she whispered. "I didn't see you in church. I didn't know you was home, even!"

Then they stood tongue-tied and shy, only their eyes speaking.

"You're—joining, too?" David said at last.

"Yes. I didn't even tell Jeannie. I wanted to surprise her. Do you think it'll be hard answering the questions?"

"Not for you," David said. Then her name burst from his lips: "Terese!"

But the doorknob turned, and Mr. Henderson looked in.

"Come, miss," he said to Terese.

As she passed David, her dress brushed his hand. The hot blood rose to his temples. He walked over to the window and stood looking soberly out. His life did not run smoothly before him, as that of the other boys at the Academy seemed to do. First there was the matter of religion. Without trying, without meaning to, he had somehow gotten started upon a strange path from which there was no honest turning back. And in the matter of his love—for David did not now disguise the name to himself—he was thwarted, not so much by any outside force as by himself. He knew as he had known at their last parting that the trouble was civil war in his own soul. On the one hand was Terese with her dark enticing beauty. He desired her with all the strength of his body. "I wonder," his thoughts ran miserably, "if I'll *ever* get over wanting her."

But on the other hand lay the future. He felt with the deep intuitive foreknowledge of youth that it held some-

thing in reserve for him. And the future towards which he was working with a fierce and eager resolve, could not hold Terese. She knew it. He knew it.

He stared out on the snow-covered graveyard and wished he were back at the Academy. It was easier there. In the routine of his work he was happy and single-minded. Here he was tortured and confused. He must be sensible, though, he told himself sharply. He and Terese had parted for good. He would try to see her as little as possible, and never speak to her again of love.

When the door reopened, Terese entered softly, her face shining.

"I answered all right, David. They passed me. I'll be a church member now like other people. I'm awfully glad."

Her red lips curved in a smile of pleasure. Her dark eyes shone full in his.

David made a quick step towards her.

"I've got to see you, Terese," he whispered huskily, "only it's too cold now in the sugar meadow."

Her breath came quickly. She half turned, fumbling with her shawl, which she had left lying on the bench. Then she said, very low:

"If you want to come to the house, Father and Mother Forsythe are going over to their cousins for a little while to-night. I'll be by myself."

"I'll come."

Mr. Henderson put his head again inside the door.

"We're ready for you, David," he said.

On the way home Sarah's face was set in peaceful lines. Daniel had told her quietly as they were getting into the sled that the Session had been more than satisfied with David's answers to their examination. To-morrow he would sit down with the rest of them at the Lord's Table. She had told the girls by a meaning nod of her head that all was well.

Supper was quiet, and the family settled afterwards to a thoughtful evening, Daniel and Mr. Richards with their Bibles, and Sarah with Baxter's "Saints' Rest," from which she derived great comfort. No one realised that David was leaving the house until he was gone.

He strode off, still torn by his inner conflict, longing to hold Terese again in his arms, and yet wishing he had not come. His high boots kept out the snow, so he went, as the crow flies, across fields, and was going up the Forsythe lane twenty minutes after he left the house. It had never crossed his mind that Big Bob and Mrs. Forsythe might have changed their plans, so he stopped dead in his tracks as Big Bob himself met him at the gate.

"Well, if it ain't David! Now this *is* a surprise! Come on in. The missus and I was goin' over to Harry Forsythe's but we put it off till Monday. I'm awful glad we didn't miss you. Come on in, Dave!"

In the big heartsome kitchen, Mrs. Forsythe and Terese sat knitting. Terese greeted him demurely, but her cheeks flamed to scarlet. Big Bob's eyes narrowed as he watched the young people. It was as though a new thought had struck him. A pleasant one, evidently, for he beamed more than ever. He went to the cellar for apples and to the attic for walnuts. There must be cake brought out, too, and some of his spiced cider. David ate and drank, not knowing one flavour from another. He was intoxicated as always by his nearness to Terese.

She wore a bright plaid flannel dress, and her black hair shone as she leaned now and then nearer the light. There was something vividly foreign and alluring about her. The tilt of her head, the way she smiled with her eyes half closed, the way she shook back her heavy hair! David tried not to look at her, and failed.

At half-past eight Big Bob began to yawn ostentatiously.

"Well, Mother, what do you say? Guess it's time us old folks got off to bed. Set on awhile, Dave, and tell Terese

all the news. She tells me you joined the church to-day, too?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, that's fine. Nice to get started bein' religious while you're young. That's where I lost out. My pap never encouraged me none, or I might have took to it easier. I mind the last time our old preacher at home ever spoke to my pap. He met him in town one day, an' he buttonholed him, an' he sez, sez he, 'Mr. Forsythe, what is the state of your conscience?' An' quick as a wink my pap sez: Good as new. Never used it!' My pap was a caution! Well now, Dave, jist set on awhile, an' Mother an' I'll bid you good-night!"

They went up the back stairs. He was alone with Terese. She moved over on the wooden settee, and he sat down beside her. He would not, he told himself harshly, put his arms around her—yet. They would talk. . . .

Then their eyes met. They had no words. Their bodies melted together. Nature had made them for each other and she would not lightly be defeated. When Terese looked up at last from his shoulder, her eyes were bright.

"You'll give up the law, Davy? Now you've joined the church here and everything, you'll stay on?"

"Mebbe I will," David said recklessly. "Mebbe I'll farm after all."

"Oh, Davy, it just ain't in me to learn books, but I can knit and bake and churn. I know all the things now for housekeepin', even makin' the apple butter an' the soap. Oh, Davy, *tell* me you'll give up the schoolin' an' be a farmer, so we can get married!"

"Mebbe I will, Terese. Mebbe I will after all." His love was sweeping him away.

And then, suddenly, Terese drew herself from him. She leaned towards the fire, her tightly clasped hands outstretched, her dark eyes wide and fixed.

"But sometime," she began in a low, tense voice,

"sometime we might be settin' like this by the fire, an' it would be winter, an' the wind would be moanin' in the chimley; an' all at once you'd be thinkin' of the city an' of how you could have been a lawyer, an' you'd wish yourself away from me. You might get to hate me, Davy, an' I couldn't stand that. I'd be wild with you an' with myself, too."

She broke off and buried her face in her hands. Her shoulders shook.

"I'd a'most rather have—the other, Davy," she whispered brokenly.

He leaned over her, terrified by her wisdom.

"What other?" he asked, trying to draw her to him again.

But Terese only bent her head lower.

"You know," she said.

It was ten o'clock when he went softly in the back door at home. The family had gone to bed. He snibbed the door behind him, and removed his shoes. His stockinged feet made no noise on the stairs, but Sarah, listening, heard him.

"Is that you, David?"

"Yes. I walked over to the Forsythes' and stayed longer than I meant to."

There was a pause. David waited uncomfortably. Then Sarah spoke again.

"There's an extra blanket on the foot of your bed. Better draw it up before you go to sleep. Good-night, David."

"Good-night, Mother."

The Communion service, celebrated but twice a year, was the event towards which the whole life of the church moved. There was in it, however, small element of spiritual stimulation or exaltation. That bread and wine were symbols of nourishment was largely lost sight of.



The experience was one of profound melancholy coupled with that desperate doubt which lay in wait to assail every earnest and orthodox Calvinist. Only the elect were saved from eternal perdition. And how could any soul be *certain* of being among the redeemed?

The church room itself presented an altered appearance as the worshipers entered quietly this December Sabbath morning. Long narrow board tables covered decently with white cloths stretched across the front of the church, and part way down either aisle. Benches at both sides would accommodate the communicants.

The large pewter plates holding the small squares of sweetened, unleavened bread covered with a napkin, and the tall decanters of grape wine with the four large pewter goblets to match, stood in the centre of the table before the pulpit. As the congregation entered, there were neither glances nor smiles exchanged. Dr. McFeeters and Mr. Richards, who was assisting him again in the service, sat side by side upon the long haircloth sofa in the pulpit, their faces covered with their hands, in prayer.

When the hour of eleven was reached on the round-faced clock on the wall, Dr. McFeeters came forward with a set face from which his eyes gleamed in their sunken sockets. He raised his hands and the congregation stood up to the strains of "Old Hundredth" then remained standing during a long prayer.

David shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

"Thou great and awful Judge of the Universe, make us to realise what a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of a living God . . ." prayed Dr. McFeeters. Daniel sighed heavily. A little fluttering breath escaped Sarah. David flushed. He was hearing again the tremulous suggestion Terese had made the night before. "I'd a'most rather have—the other, Davy." Even as he had asked her, he knew what she meant. And the knowledge seemed to be old with him. It was as though she had

but given timid form to the joint thoughts of their hearts. But they had left it there, a thought half spoken, and turned away from it a little frightened.

The prayer was over. The congregation sat down. It was time for the hymn.

*"'Twas on that dark, that doleful night  
When powers of earth and hell arose . . ."*

The wailing minor key added its worst to the melancholy words. David felt Jeannie's involuntary shiver next him. He leaned nearer. He hoped life would always go smoothly for Jeannie. Terese seemed years older, though she was just her age. But how could life go smoothly for Terese—or for him? They had been caught in a trap.

It was time for the reception of the new members. Joe Falkner and Mattie from Poke Run had joined by letter, so he and Terese wouldn't have to stand up just the two of them. He was on his feet.

"Do you promise to make diligent use of the means of grace. . . ."

David nodded blindly whenever Dr. McFeeters paused. Out of the tail of his eye he could see Terese across the church in a new plaid shawl.

At last, *that* was over. He sat down again, his face burning. His mother was wiping her eyes. So were Liza Jane and Betsy. He wished women weren't so soft about things like this.

The sermon moved on in slow, weighty cadences, Dr. McFeeters' bony fingers pointing out the hidden sin in every heart. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" was the burden of the theme. Side by side with the half-recognised words that beat upon his ear, David's inner thoughts were running: "After all, why shouldn't we have our love and our happiness now, and let the future bring what it will? If Terese is willing to take the chance, if Terese is willing. . . ."

At last there was a stir of solemn expectancy. After the singing of the next hymn, the church members would take their seats at the tables. Once again the voices rose.

*"He dies! The friend of sinners dies!  
Lo! Salem's daughters weep around!  
A solemn darkness veils the skies,  
A sudden trembling shakes the ground."*

There was a subdued shuffle of feet. The communicants were leaving their uncarpeted pews to make their way towards the tables. Daniel had already joined the other Elders at the front, where they would dispense the sacred "elements." David sat down between his mother and Jeannie near the end of the long front table. His mother's face looked white and drawn. David had a sudden fierce feeling that no artificial weight of guilt should ever be laid upon his mother's gentle heart. Life itself had given her enough burdens. Then he caught himself up sharply. He was about to partake of his first Communion. He prayed wordlessly for help that his thoughts might not wander. But Dr. McFeeters' voice struck again discordantly into his consciousness.

"We invite to this table all those who are sensible of their *lost and helpless state of sin*. . . ."

David winced. These were such decent people who sat here with their tense, contrite faces. Such honest, kindly people. Was God really dooming any one of them? Suppose, for example, Big Bob had never agreed to come before the Session for his trial last summer. Suppose he were now banned from the Communion table, would God consider him *lost*? It was unthinkable.

David bit his lips. Why did his mind go inquiring along strange pathways? Why could he not accept what all these about him accepted unquestionably? His hands gripped each other beneath the table. The heavy round

pewter plate of bread was coming nearer, was finally at his mother's place. He took it from her, held it for a strange, breathless moment, then passed it on to Jeannie. The small square of bread was sweet upon his tongue. Prissy Hidden always baked the Communion bread. Her mother before her had made it, and *her* mother, so they said. Holy bread. Body of the Lord. David bent his head, tried desperately to fix his thoughts upon the Atonement, and failed. "O God," he prayed passionately, "make a man of me! A man who will look life straight in the face. . . ."

The cup was coming. Wine of God. Blood of Christ, "shed for many for the remission of sins." Now, now surely a change would be wrought in his soul. He took the cup from his mother's hand and raised it to his lips. He didn't know how much he should take. Just a sip; his tongue barely moist with the taste of the grape, he held it out to Jeannie. Mrs. Forsythe always made the grape wine for Communion. He had forgotten about that. Terese would have helped make this. Terese. The fire burned again within him. If Terese was willing. . . . It was not as though he himself had spoken.

For the first time he raised his eyes, seeking her. Then he saw her, and a tremor went over him. For the face of Terese was raised, unconscious of those about her; her eyes rapt, as in a vision of grace. The mystic miracle which had passed him by, had been wrought in her. She had tasted of the body and blood of the Lord.

Long, long afterwards in Rome, David was to see a pictured saint on the walls of St. Peter's and know it for the face of Terese at her first Communion!

There was a scraping of chairs, a movement of feet, and then utter, hushed silence. Into it came the voice of Mr. Richards pronouncing the benediction.

"Now the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,

through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make us perfect. . . .”

David felt as though a clean, strong hand had been reached out to him. He grasped it. His shoulders straightened. “No,” he said to his own soul, “not that. I can’t do that to Terese. She doesn’t understand. I’ve got to be strong for the two of us, God help me!”

“. . . to whom be glory for ever and ever. *Amen.*”

That night, as David and Jeannie slipped out of the house for their usual few moments alone under the stars, David spoke a thought that had been in his mind all the afternoon.

“He’s a fine fellow, Mr. Richards. I wish, Jeannie—I wish he and you would mebbe get to like each other. But,” he added soberly, “I believe it’s either Liza Jane or Betsy he’s got his eyes on, from the looks of things.”

For a long minute Jeannie was silent; then she said suddenly, “I don’t believe I’ll stay out any longer, Davy.”

“Why, what’s wrong? Are you cold?”

“Sort of.”

David followed her slowly back to the house. It was unusual for Jeannie to be the first to suggest going inside. But, had he only known it, Jeannie’s thoughts at the moment were unusual, too.

## CHAPTER VII

THE CHANGE IN MR. RICHARDS BEGAN TO BE APPARENT early in January. Liza Jane and Betsy were the first to notice it, and each silently attributed it to a sentimental cause relevant to herself. There had grown up a barrier between the sisters. The old intimate freedom of speech was gone. At night, as they prepared for bed, they talked perhaps of David or the farm work or the neighbours, but never now of themselves or of Mr. Richards. They were not even at peace at their prayers, for they knew, bitterly enough, that they were offering rival petitions at the throne of grace. An increased tension gripped them as the weeks went on and they realised that for once neither could consider the happiness of the other. In the hopes and longings that overwhelmed them, each could think only of herself. They had been accustomed to going to sleep with their bodies fitted together, Liza Jane's arm around Betsy, her hand held in Betsy's own. For some time now they had ceased to do this. They slept with a little distance between them, each facing outwards.

It was Sarah, however, that spoke first of Mr. Richards' altered behaviour.

"I'm afraid there's something troubling him. Have you noticed, girls? He doesn't eat like he used to, and he doesn't seem free and happy like. I hope he isn't sick."

Even Daniel soon became aware of the fact that Mr. Richards sat reading quietly in the evenings, apparently unwilling to talk. He made no further move to watch the stars with Jeannie. Sarah, indeed, noticed that his dark mood seemed heaviest when Jeannie was near.

The truth of the matter was that things were not going



well at Painter Hollow. A change had subtly crept over the school after Christmas. At first Mr. Richards was puzzled, then irritated, then despairing. He had put his best efforts into his teaching and had felt a great satisfaction in his work. He had more to give to his pupils than the usual country school teacher, and he had spared no pains. He knew without thought of vanity that his winter there would be remembered.

Then suddenly, overnight, something began to change. Instead of the quiet, busy hum that meant that his pupils were at work, there had developed a restlessness. Even the tots in the front row sensed it and wriggled in their seats. Vague, small disturbing noises became audible; a forced sneeze, a smothered titter, an overloud whisper.

Mr. Richards rapped his ruler on the desk and asked for quiet, never doubting that all would be as usual in a few moments. But the indefinite disorder continued.

On the third day of it Mr. Richards' nerves were on edge. For the first time his strong arms ached to thrash somebody. But the alarming fact which grew upon him was that the trouble was not with the boys. The remedy then would have been simple. The boys were not working as they had been; they shared the general restlessness that had overtaken the schoolroom, but they were not the instigators of it. No, Mr. Richards slowly realised, the enemy had attacked him upon his weakest flank. The trouble began on the girls' side. And as the uncomfortable days went on, he made a discovery which hurt him out of all proportion to the facts. The culprit was Jeannie.

He began watching her carefully, hoping to convince himself that she had no real intent to harass him; that she was bent upon purely innocent mischief, due to the lightness of her own spirits. But the facts did not uphold this idea. Jeannie dropped her slate pencil, then her slate; Jeannie sang the geography song off-key; Jeannie made

large eyes at the tots who turned around fascinated to watch her. She mispronounced words in the reading class, sending waves of laughter over the room. She was, Mr. Richards felt sure, the source of weird, ventriloquistic sounds, as she sat innocently behind her book. But how could one prove it? Worst of all, she suddenly developed a smiling and, one might say, quite irreproachable attitude of disrespect towards Mr. Richards himself. She never quite overstepped a line, and yet she managed with entire success to demoralise the whole school.

Mr. Richards spoke to her earnestly one evening as they walked up the lane together.

"I know I have only to ask you, Jeannie. To explain how much it means to me and to all the school to have order and obedience and respect. . . ."

Jeannie was profoundly innocent. Only the bright twinkle in her eyes belied her words.

"Why, I'm sure, Mr. Richards, I don't do anything wrong. Wasn't I the first to finish all my 'rithmetic problems?"

The second time he talked to her, he threw himself upon her mercy. But Jeannie was alternately injured and coquettish.

"Jeannie, can't I make you see what you're doing to me?" he burst out.

And Jeannie, watching his harried face, tossed her curls and answered lightly that she didn't know what he meant.

Mr. Richards indeed was suffering a fine torture. Through the day, with nerves on edge, he tried to do battle with the intangible element that constantly opposed him. And by night he lay awake wounded to the very core of him, and mystified by the depth of the wound. He resolved in the darkness to speak to Daniel or Sarah; but the next day, his decision melted. It seemed such a petty thing in the telling. And yet he must soon have advice from some one.

One Saturday he followed Liza Jane into the parlour where she had gone for a book. He closed the door behind him and stood nervously before her.

"Liza Jane," he began, in his earnestness forgetting the *Miss*, "I've had something on my mind and heart these last weeks that I—Indeed, I have thought of talking to your father and mother, and then I felt perhaps you would allow me to speak first to you."

Liza Jane had gone stone-white, then rosy with colour. Her heart was pounding, and her voice when she spoke sounded strange.

"But of course—of course you may speak to me," she stammered.

A fresh young voice was heard coming through the hall.

"*'Can she bake a cherry pie, Billy boy, Billy boy?'*"

"Another time when we won't be interrupted," Mr. Richards said hastily, and went out.

Liza Jane stood still, her hands pressed to her heart, her limbs trembling beneath her. It was true then. He loved her. He was about to ask her in marriage. *Marriage!* She fell upon her knees by the haircloth chair.

"O God in heaven, I can't bear this joy! I can't thank Thee! O God, help me to make him happy—to be a good wife. O God, to think of me being *his* wife! Dear God. . . ."

All during dinner Liza Jane had such a high colour that her mother wondered if she were taking a fever.

Meanwhile Betsy was preparing an offering for her beloved. For weeks she had been knitting a scarf which she allowed the family to think was for David. Into it she had put the most intricate stitches she knew. The purling was perfection. She had asked Mr. Richards quite casually

in the fall when his birthday came, then had kept the secret. It was February 8th. The scarf was done a few days before, and folded in a clean bit of wrapping paper. She used up several sheets of foolscap before her fine slanting script entirely pleased her. But at last it, too, was ready:

TO MR. JAMES R. RICHARDS, A HAPPY BIRTHDAY

*In Life's fair Album as you write  
From Child-hood till your Journey's end  
Whatever Others are to you  
Mark Me as one who was A Friend.*

BETSY.

She took the package up stealthily and laid it on the bureau in his room on the afternoon of the 8th; then she manœuvred her work so that she would be in the sitting-room alone when he came downstairs. She had hoped he would be pleased, but she had not expected the rush of feeling in his voice as he caught her hands impulsively in his own.

"Miss Betsy! I don't know what to say. The gift of your own work means more to me than I can express."

There *was* a mist in his eyes!

"I've been homeless so long, I'm unused to such kindness. And just now, when I'm most discouraged, your gift and your words give me hope——"

Sarah came in from the kitchen, and Betsy slipped up to her own room. The words rang in her head like chimes. "When I'm most discouraged, you give me hope." Oh, what other meaning could it have than the one she longed to hear! It was true. All she had dreamed of was coming true. She would be his wife, a *minister's* wife! She would be important and respected and never bashful and left out any more. And there would be babies!

Betsy bowed her fair head on the bedpost. A child against her breast! *His* child!

All during supper, she was very quiet. She scarcely raised her eyes for fear the family would read the burning joy in them. She suddenly felt a great wave of pity for Liza Jane.

The days wore on through February. The snow was leaving. The tops of the hills had great bare patches, and the unsightly corners of the barnyard and fence rows now stood revealed. But a new magic was taking the place of the snow. Jeannie had seen a robin on one of the orchard trees; one of the cows had calved, and the small wild things were mating joyously in the gusty meadow. Daniel came hurrying to the house to tell the women-folk that one of the ewes had dropped a lamb in the upper pasture. They brought it into the kitchen, and Sarah wrapped a bit of old blanket about it and set it in a basket behind the stove. Betsy hunted up the bottle and nipple they kept for such emergencies. If all went well the rest of the new lambs would not be dropped till March. But the one tiny, shivering forerunner in the basket set the seal upon the season. Winter was past. Spring was all but here.

Mr. Richards, however, did not feel that lift of spirit which this time of the year usually brought him, for things were no better at Painter Hollow, and the hurt in his heart was changing to a consuming anger. There came the day at last when he could stand it no longer. Everything had been intolerable. He was losing his grip. As the restless, wearisome afternoon came near an end and Jeannie was still smilingly defiant, he felt his lips grow white. He had known anger like this but once before in his life. That was on the canal boat when he had knocked a surly big fellow down and thrown him overboard.

At four o'clock he came to the edge of the rostrum. He

looked taller even than his six feet two as he stood there. Something in his set face and the look in his black eyes made a quiet fall upon the room.

"I wish all the pupils with the exception of *Jeannie McDowell* to collect their books and wraps and leave the schoolhouse as quickly as possible!"

There was an instant's awed hush, and then, with many side looks at one another and at Jeannie, the children prepared for departure. The unnatural silence showed the tension of the crisis. Jeannie's face was scarlet with surprise and mortification, but she kept an air of bravado. She smiled as usual, and her little curls tossed spiritedly. Mr. Richards did not move until the last pair of thick shoes had clattered down the outside steps; then he walked to the door and locked it, putting the key in his pocket.

"Come here, Jeannie," he said sharply, as he came back to the front of the room.

Jeannie rose slowly, and with a question in her eyes came near him. She managed a small grimace to keep up her courage.

"Jeannie," Mr. Richards said, his anger still hot within him, "for nearly two months now you have destroyed all that I've tried to do here. You've set the children against me. You've flaunted my authority!"

Deep underneath was running the refrain that had torn at him night and day: "She doesn't care. She doesn't care. She hates me."

"I've asked you, I've pled with you," he went on, "and it's done no good. Now it's time for something else, for by Heaven, you've got to know who's master."

He reached out and caught her shoulders in a grip of iron and then shook her like a rat.

He had expected her to struggle, to strike at him, perhaps to bite or kick. Then he would use his full strength, overcome her, conquer her once for all.

But Jeannie did not struggle. Instead, he felt her tender



body like a brittle thing beneath his furious fingers. She did not cry out. But as he relaxed his grip for a second, he saw her eyes raised to his with a look of anguished amazement that twisted his heart like a knife. The anger went out of him, and the reality of his love, long pent up, broke from him. His arms encircled her, cradled her against his breast while the deep buried words of his passion poured out.

"Jeannie! I love you so. I love you! Since that first day when you sat in my room. I love you so terribly. And it's worked like a madness in me when I thought you were flouting me. Darling of my heart, can you ever forgive me? You must, Jeannie. I can't *live* if you hate me. . . . I can't endure it!"

At last she looked up. The anguish was gone from her eyes. There was a beautiful new light in them. "I do love you," she whispered. "I'm sure it must be love . . . it's so strange . . . and it was like a madness in me too when I thought it was Liza Jane or Betsy you liked. I guess that's why I . . . I acted so bad. I'll always be good now. . . ."

He sat in his teacher's chair by the stove and held her close to him. It was sweeter than he could have dreamed.

"And you'll marry me, Jeannie? I'll be so good to you, so gentle with you. Will you marry me soon, dear?"

Jeannie raised her head from his shoulder.

"I guess I'll have to, for I couldn't stay behind when you leave. I'd die, I think. But I haven't made any quilts yet, and I can't knit a sock right in the heel!"

He took her face between his hands, and smiled into her eyes.

"That's the very least of it, Jeannie."

They were startled by the slanting shadows, and the thought that they must leave. The fire had blazed up anew in the big stove. The windows were high; no one could look in. The door was locked. They were warm

and secure and utterly alone. Then because they were secure too in their own purity of heart, Mr. Richards unbuttoned her flannel dress and slipped it and the cotton chemise down from her shoulders, so that he could press his lips to the red marks his hands had left upon her arms. When he raised his head his eyes were wet. But Jeannie, with her own hands, wiped the tears away.

They agreed on the way home that they would say nothing as yet about their secret. It was Jeannie who begged for a little delay. "Just till I get used to the feel of being in love," she pleaded quaintly.

So they entered the big kitchen as usual, Mr. Richards going at once to his room and Jeannie busying herself with the others at the supper-getting. But they all heard him whistling above. The air was "Billy Boy": "She's a young thing and cannot leave her mother!" He ran down the stairs later instead of walking. And the change in him was still more marked at table. He had never talked so entertainingly. He laughed often, too, and flashed a look from his dark eyes at the older girls, each of whom intercepted it as her own. Sarah was moved to remark, "I'm so glad you're feeling so well, Mr. Richards."

"Oh, it's the spring, I guess."

But he scarcely looked at Jeannie. He found he could not, without giving their secret away.

After supper Daniel sat in a corner of the kitchen with a pile of elderberry stalks beside him. With his penknife he carefully cut and fashioned from them the spiles that were to be put into the big sugar maples in the meadow.

"The sap's running early this year," he remarked as Mr. Richards came over to help him. "I think I'll get the spiles in to-morrow. March, you know, is always sugaring time."

"And it's fun," Jeannie put in, "only I always eat too much of the first sugar."

She brought her favourite stool and sat down beside

Mr. Richards, laying the spiles in a symmetrical heap. Daniel talked on, pleased that their guest's heavy mood had lifted and conversation could be resumed. Sarah and the older girls finished their work in the kitchen and went into the sitting-room. Suddenly Mr. Richards felt Jeannie's head droop against his knee. Her face was very white, and there were dark shadows below her closed lids. His heart smote him. He called softly to Sarah, who came at once.

"I think Jeannie is very tired," he said. "I'll carry her upstairs if you will come along and show me her room."

"I saw she looked white at supper," Sarah said anxiously, "and she seemed quiet like. Oh, I expect it's a little cold brewing in her. I'll give her a good drink of camomile tea in the morning and keep her home from school a day if she isn't in good fettle. You needn't bother carrying her, Mr. Richards. That's foolish. I'll wake her up."

"No," said Mr. Richards firmly, "I'll take her."

He raised her so gently she did not waken. She lay in his arms as though exhausted from the strange events of the afternoon. Sarah, going ahead with the candle, did not see Mr. Richards press his lips to her cheek as he climbed the stairs. But she did notice the look on his face as he deposited his burden on the bed in the eaves room. She wondered deeply, but kept her own counsel.

"We'll let her sleep on in the morning," Sarah said. "When a body's as young as Jeannie, that's a cure for anything."

For three weeks the sap ran in the sugar maples. The sun grew daily stronger, and Painter Hollow moved smoothly again on its regular course. It was nearing the end of the term, for by April the larger boys were all needed to help with the ploughing and the planting of the oats. Sometimes at recess the pupils gathered around Jeannie to ask again what happened on the evening when

Mr. Richards kept her alone after school. But Jeannie's answer never varied. "Oh, he just talked to me," she would say. But they noted a change in her none the less.

She and Mr. Richards had few moments alone together. Twice when Terese was not at school, they stayed on for a while in the schoolhouse, lost in their love, and making plans for the future. Sometimes they went out in the evening to watch the stars. There was a chance then for one of the strange long kisses at which Jeannie marvelled.

"I must soon tell your father and mother, Jeannie," he kept urging, while Jeannie shyly begged for a little more time.

Twice a day now, Daniel went to the sugar meadow to empty the troughs of hollowed logs that stood under the trees. Mr. Richards had been greatly interested in all the work of the sugar camp. He had helped bore the tap holes with an auger and insert the spiles, three or four in each tree. He helped now, carrying the buckets of sap from the troughs to the rough shed which sheltered the fireplace.

The sugaring-off was set for a Saturday so that all hands could help. It was a chill March day with a blustery wind blowing. The ground was wet from the last light skift of snow, and in the corners of the sugar meadow where the sun did not easily penetrate there was still ice. Everybody had been early astir that morning, Liza Jane in particular. Jealously guarding her own hope, she had felt that Mr. Richards' changed demeanour was due to the fact that since the unforgettable day in the parlour she had been more free with him. Once she had even called him "James." He had turned quickly with a smile. "Good! Maybe you can teach the others to do that!" Any day now, any time, he would speak!

Something beat upon her heart this morning with a peculiar excitement. She felt young and immeasurably

happy. Indeed, her feelings since she had been sure of Mr. Richards' love had been intoxicating. She laughed as she rattled the pans and pails they were taking with them. Once a thought like a cold hand struck her. It was the lines from a hymn:

*We should expect some danger nigh  
When most we feel delight.*

But she thrust it off. She felt invincible. Her only real dread now was Betsy's disappointment when she knew.

Betsy, meanwhile, secure in her own joyous conviction that Mr. Richards' recovered spirits were due to the encouragement she had given him (had he not told her so?), had been going about wrapped in a warm dream of delight. She was living vividly in the future. She had furnished the parsonage where she would some day preside. She had chosen her bridal gown. She had named the babies that already seemed to lie upon her yearning breast. She did not attempt any greater freedom with Mr. Richards. She sat with eyes modestly cast down, blushing when he spoke to her, but trying to show him in small ways that she was only waiting for his final declaration to show him that her heart was entirely his.

This morning she took great pains to look in the small kitchen mirror as she put on her knitted hood. No need to look like a fright even at a sugaring-off. She let a little of her blonde hair show at each side. Her round cheeks were very pink. She prayed that her nose would not get red as it sometimes did in the wind.

There was a quick scurry at the last, for Daniel was taking them all, along with the great kettles and other equipment, in the light spring wagon. But they finally rattled off down the lane and on around the road for a half-mile. Then Daniel and Mr. Richards made a breach



in the fence—where it was made each spring—and the wagon lurched into the sugar meadow.

Daniel unhitched the horse and tied it to the fence. Mr. Richards, supervised by the women, made the fire in the fireplace in front of the rough shed. The girls brought the three big kettles from the wagon and hung the first one on one of the hooks of the wooden framework over the fireplace. Everything was ready. There was a great deal of calling and laughing, shouts of "Careful there," as Daniel and Mr. Richards emptied the first buckets of sap into the great kettle waiting to receive it. Betsy threw in a strip of fat pork to keep the contents from boiling over later; Liza Jane teased the fire to a fuller flame, and the sugar-making was really begun.

Sarah, her countenance intent upon the work, peered into the boiling mass, watching for the point when it should be emptied into the second kettle. At the end of an hour, the three kettles were filled with the sweet liquid at different stages of its progress towards crystallisation.

The sun had gone under a cloud, and the wind was biting. There was less laughter as hands grew cold and feet grew wet. Betsy knew that her hood was askew and her nose red. Liza Jane felt a heaviness, a prescience of sorrow. "I'm always downhearted when my feet get cold," she told herself stoutly, but the feeling persisted.

The third kettle was at last pronounced done and ready to sugar off. With great care and repeated warnings from the others, Daniel and Mr. Richards lifted it from the hook and carried it back a little way in the woods to the thickest ice available for setting out its contents. Sarah and the older girls hovered over it.

"I don't think we took it off too soon."

"No, look, it's hardening round the sides already."

"It seemed to take so long to-day somehow——"

A scream cut through the woods. As they turned they



saw Jeannie running towards them, a spurt of flame leaping about her clothes as she came.

"James!" she cried in terror. "James!"

He reached her first; flung himself against her, with his bare hands tore off her burning shawl, beat out the flames that were licking upwards towards her face.

"Bring snow," he called. "Snow!"

They brought it, scraping up the thin coating with frenzied hands as they ran. There seemed to be no time to think, to breathe until the flames were gone and Jeannie white and trembling, was standing safe before them, her flannel dress hanging in charred shreds.

And then Mr. Richards forgot that there was any one in the sugar meadow besides himself and his love. He took her in his arms.

"Jeannie darling! Thank God! Thank God you're safe!"

Jeannie looked up, and, as she did, the family instinctively drew back a little. None of them, not even Sarah, had ever thought of Jeannie as possessing such beauty! Her love lay upon her features now like a light.

"Your hands," she was saying. "James, your poor hands!"

"They deserved to be burned," Mr. Richards said grimly, though no one but Jeannie knew what he meant. "But it's nothing, *nothing*, when you're safe."

Then suddenly they both grew self-conscious. Jeannie looked at the family, blushed scarlet, and turned again to hide her face against Mr. Richards' coat. He started to speak, but Sarah broke in quickly.

"I think we've happened on a secret, and we'll have much to talk of to-night, but just now we've got to get you both to the house, and dress those burns and look after you. Daniel, hitch up quickly. Girls, can you finish up here yourselves? Why, you look like death itself, both of you! They'll neither of them take any hurt from it

now, I'm sure, so don't worry. Father'll be back for you, girls. Come on, Jeannie. Come on, Mr. Richards. I know you must be in sore pain from those hands."

As the spring wagon turned into the road, the older girls heard Jeannie explaining excitedly: "I was just watching one of the kettles, and I wanted to make it bubble more; so I tried to stir up the fire. And the wind blew my apron in it—it all happened so quick, it was awful; but I wasn't scared any more when I saw James coming to me."

Liza Jane and Betsy stood still for long minutes after the wagon was out of sight. They did not speak, nor look at each other. The tears were flowing unhindered down Betsy's cheeks. Liza Jane's eyes were dry and stony, and her lips were white. The old bitterness had returned to them, as though to stay. She moved slowly at last about the work of finishing up the sugaring. Betsy went close to her, her mouth quivering.

"Oh, Liza Jane!" she began.

But her sister stopped her sharply.

"Don't come near me! Don't talk to me! I can't stand it."

So there was silence except for the gusty wind. The sky seemed more lowering than it had been, and the air more chill. The girls kept to their work, their heavy shoes wet, their hands red and cold. There was no joy left in the morning or in the world, and their youth seemed to have fled with it. When at last they heard the wagon rattling back along the road, Liza Jane spoke in a voice too hard for a woman's:

"As God is my witness, I wish I might never know the smell or the taste of maple sugar again as long as I live!"

Betsy's only answer was a sob.

It was a strange afternoon and evening, with Jeannie propped in the big rocker, her bandaged ankles on the stool, and Mr. Richards with his hands bound up in

sweet oil and cotton, sitting near her, feasting his eyes openly upon her. Sarah was nervously happy, though a shadow crossed her face often, and Daniel was immensely proud and pleased. He esteemed Mr. Richards above any man he had ever known, except Pater Donaldson, and the thought of his being united to the family was as gratifying to him as it was startling. Liza Jane and Betsy kept very busy in the kitchen, though they had bravely gone through the motions of wishing the lovers well.

After an early supper Jeannie was sent to bed to recover from the excitement of the day. The older girls silently picked up their knitting, and Mr. Richards began to speak seriously about his plans.

"I should like to talk to you all together, if I may. You've all been so good to me, I feel already like a son and a brother. I hope you'll accept me as such. Now, as to our—our marriage"—his dark eyes shone as he spoke the word—"if you are agreed, Mrs. McDowell, and you, sir, I should like it to be soon. I'm not just a youth, you know. I'm almost thirty, and since Jeannie is willing. . . . You see, my intention is to go back to the Seminary and finish my work there this summer. It sounds like vanity to mention it, but I must under the circumstances: I have been assured that I can probably have my choice of several churches in the fall. So that if we can be married soon, I can take Jeannie with me to Allegheny. We can board for the summer—I know a nice reasonable place—and Jeannie would enjoy the novelty of the city."

"It would be a wonderful experience for her," Sarah said slowly.

"Then in the fall we could get settled in a real home, if all goes well." Mr. Richards hesitated. "You see, I have to be at the Seminary the 1st of May, and Jeannie says she—she doesn't want me to leave her behind."

Then Sarah gave a little cry.

"But it seems so soon! Oh, Mr. Richards, she's so young. She's only a child!"

"I know," he said gravely. "But if you trust Jeannie to me, Mrs. McDowell, her happiness will be more precious to me than my own life."

Liza Jane suddenly put down her knitting and started for the door. Betsy followed. The other three scarcely heard their "Good-night."

The girls undressed quietly, blew out their candle, said their prayers, and got into bed. For a long time neither spoke; then Betsy said thickly:

"Liza Jane?"

"Yes."

"After all, mebbe it's easier than if it had been one of us. I mean, if it had been you it would have killed me, I guess."

"I know."

"Oh, Liza Jane, did you think it was *you*?"

"Yes."

"And I thought it was me. . . . It's something that we can talk to each other again, like we used to. If I couldn't talk to anybody now, I'm afraid I'd—I'd do away with myself. It's past bearing, somehow."

Dry sobs interrupted her. It was Liza Jane. All the repressions of years were broken. Her thin body was racked by her despair. Betsy touched her gently.

"Don't, Liza Jane. Anyway, it's something, isn't it, that we can comfort each other? That it's both of us that has to suffer. . . ."

At last the sobs grew quiet. Liza Jane turned over and, drawing Betsy's warm body to hers, put her arm around her as she used to do. Her voice was broken by heavy, convulsive breaths.

"If it's God's will, we've no right to question it. And as to the pain of it—we'll just have to thole."

When they finally went to sleep their hands were still clasped.

The wedding day was set for the 26th of April, which would be Jeannie's nineteenth birthday. Sarah's heart was torn between her joy for Jeannie's happiness and the terrible new thought of losing her. It seemed impossible to imagine life without Jeannie. But there was small time by day, at least, to dwell upon it. The matter of wedding clothes alone was a grave consideration, which had to be settled at once. Daniel and Sarah made a trip to New Salem and talked the matter over with Colonel Galloway. He was heartily kind.

"Yes, yes, yes! By all means fit Jeannie out to do you credit, and let it stand on the books. There's sure to be good crops this year. Come, come, Mrs. McDowell, and see what's just arrived to-day week from Philadelphia!"

He removed the lid from a large round box and proudly brought out a handful of hats, flat little straws with gay streamers. Sarah selected a black one with a dull rose ribbon. It looked to her unbelievably stylish and elegant. She could picture it perched atop Jeannie's curls.

"How much is it?" she asked fearfully.

"One dollar! One dollar! And cheap at that, right from Philadelphia! You picked the best one—finest quality. Jeannie's going to the city, you say? Um-h'm. Well, she'll be well set out in this hat. Now what else?"

Sarah felt wicked in her extravagance, but for once she did not resist.

"Dress goods," she said. She was experiencing a new elation in buying several important things at once, and the Colonel himself waiting on her.

"A nice piece of silk? My, it isn't every young girl that gets a fine young preacher for a husband. And Jeannie'll make as pretty a bride as was ever in the county. What about this piece?"

"Black seems a little old for her," Sarah hesitated. "I had thought of a shot gray, mebbe——"

But the Colonel was rubbing his hands delightedly.

"I've got it! Just you wait! Something new. Never unwrapped yet. A little more expensive than the plain, but for a bride——"

He worked quickly, getting down a large package from the upper shelf, cutting the thick wrappings, exposing to Sarah's view at last a lustrous black silk with tiny rosebud sprigs! Sarah's eyes gloated upon it. She touched it softly with her work-hardened fingers. All the economical rectitude of a lifetime forsook her.

"I'll take a dress length of this," she said breathlessly. She did not dare take time to consider. When she heard the sound of the shears in it she relaxed, knowing that retraction now was impossible.

Over her other purchases she took plenty of time. She decided on a lightweight bombazine for the going-away dress, and a fine black cashmere for a mantle.

"I'll have it made up dolman style, so I'll want fringe."

"Yes, certainly, certainly. Here it is. Very best silk fringe."

At last there was but one more item on the list. Sarah lowered her voice a little.

"And some bleached muslin, a pretty fine quality."

The Colonel had it on the counter in a moment, but he allowed his eyes to rove towards the groceries and hardware, any place that they did not meet Sarah's. Neither of them had ever heard of the word "lingerie," and nightgowns and chemises could not be mentioned openly between the sexes, but they understood each other perfectly. Sarah thumbed the muslin carefully while the Colonel appeared not to notice.

After he cut the piece off, he hurried to the upper end of the long counter and returned with a large pasteboard box. From it he drew a bolt of narrow white trimming. He lowered his voice a trifle.

"Coronation braid," he said. "There's some makes



designs of it on yokes. Very pretty. Something new. Only a penny a yard."

Sarah fingered it with an air of casualness.

"I might take ten yards," she said.

When she climbed into the buggy beside Daniel her eyes were shining.

"Jeannie'll have as fine a settin' out as any girl could wish. I'm glad we did it, Daniel. We'll pay for it somehow later on. If you'll drive round through Confluence, now, I'll stop at Prissy Hidden's and see if she'll come for a week and help us out with the sewing. She's always willing to take most of her pay out in eatables. A crock of butter and a side of flitch we'll never miss, and it will be a relief to turn the fine sewing over to her. I only hope she isn't spoke for too far ahead."

Prissy came to the door herself, thin, wiry, sharp-eyed as usual. Sarah stated her errand. Prissy's suspicious nose twitched.

"Sounds like wedding haste," she sniffed. "Haven't I been sayin' you can't keep a handsome young man and three pretty girls in the house together all winter without makin' a spoon or spoilin' a horn?"

Sarah stiffened. "There have been no horns spoiled, I'll have you know."

Prissy suddenly became ingratiating.

"Of course. It's only the old sayin', you know. Why, to be sure I'll come. Next week, if you want me." Her eyes narrowed playfully. "An' there's be a *silk*, I doubt, to be made up."

Sarah smiled, too. "There might be," she admitted. "But we'll tell you all about it when you come."

Once again in the buggy, Sarah said:

"I hate having Prissy in the house for a week, but it can't be helped. Her tongue wags at both ends. I declare she knows all the gossip, from how many shirts Dr. McFeeters has in the wash every week to which man

was last seen going towards Moll Hostetter's. I hope she don't talk too free in front of Jeannie."

As they neared the house Sarah's face clouded.

"Daniel, I'm afraid it's going to be hard on the older girls, Jeannie's wedding. Her being the youngest and all, and getting the fine clothes! But what else could I do about the buying? We must give Jeannie her due, and her going to the city and mebbe in the early fall to her husband's *congregation*! I couldn't do less for her, and yet I hate not having new dresses for Liza Jane and Betsy."

Daniel had small sympathy. "Tut, tut! They ought to be proud that their sister has made such a match, even if they didn't. We all have to take what the Lord sorts out for us in life."

"I suppose so," Sarah murmured. But her heart was busy with a prayer that *all* her girls might be happy.

The sewing proceeded apace. Prissy's shears and needle flew as fast as her tongue. She had a knack at fitting that amounted to genius. The sprigged silk, under her hands, became a wedding gown. The tiny blushing rosebuds on its shimmering surface were just the colour those days of Jeannie's cheeks. She and Mr. Richards did not have to be secret now about their love. Whenever they were in the room together their looks met and clung. They watched the stars each night, but their thoughts were not on them. They walked slowly over the worn farm paths, his arm around her, her hand clasping his. It was sweet, Sarah thought, to see them together. All that her own heart could have given to a man of a different mould from Daniel, all the unspent love within her, she felt would somehow now be used in Jeannie's union with James. She warmed herself at their flame.

It was decided finally that the wedding would be at four o'clock. It had been so set because of Jeannie's unconscious look of disappointment over the fact of there

being no "infare" at the groom's house, as was the custom the night of a wedding. Mr. Richards, being homeless, could not take his bride to his people. A wedding was usually a stiff and serious noonday event with the older folk as guests. The infare represented the evening party, the merry-making among the younger people. It was Sarah, seeing the distress in Mr. Richards' eyes, who solved the problem. They would have the wedding ceremony at four with just a few of their old neighbours as guests. They would serve a hot supper early; then in the evening they would have the young folks in. So there would be an infare after all.

They were all counting carefully together which young people should be invited when Jeannie said suddenly: "Don't ask Ben Brown, Mother, please. He always stares at me so, and he'll mebbe ask me to go riding with him——"

In the general laughter that followed Mr. Richards made a show of doubling up his strong fists.

"Don't you realise, young lady, that by the time Ben Brown gets here you'll be *my wife*? And I'd like to see him or anybody else steal you away from me."

Sarah made a pretext to leave the group. An anxiety clung to her. Jeannie was such a child, so young even for her years. She had never been quick at putting two and two together in the biological drama of farm life. Her innocence had often caused a hidden smile in the family.

"She don't know what it is to be a wife," Sarah thought. "I ought to talk to her, mebbe, but—oh, I *couldn't*! I *couldn't*!"

Sarah felt a lack in her motherhood, and yet she had taught her girls as every good mother did: to love God, to be modest, to read their Bibles and say their prayers and knit a sock. As for any knowledge of the great mysteries of life and sex, they must be learned by intuition

or from sources outside the family. Even between herself and Daniel there were deep reticences which cut across their experience like a crevasse. So now, in a sort of terror, she felt helpless to speak to her child on the subject of marriage. "I guess it'll work out all right," she told herself vaguely, but her heart yearned over the little girl who still dwelt in Jeannie's breast.

The short weeks slipped past. The dresses were made, and the dolman. So were the nightgowns and chemises, the former decorated all the extent of their high yokes with an intricate design of Coronation braid. As to the quilts and "comforts" that a bride should take with her, Sarah and the older girls would work on them during the summer.

It had been Jeannie's wish to write David the great news herself. Poor David had been stunned upon receiving it. When he had spoken his hopes to Jeannie at Christmas time he had been thinking of years to come. The thought of Jeannie married and leaving home just as he was coming back for the summer was a bitter blow to his own happiness. Like Sarah, he could not picture life at home without Jeannie. But his admiration for Mr. Richards bore him up. He would be a brother worth having. He covered up both his amazement and his hurt and wrote Jeannie that he would be home for the wedding if Father could come for him.

All the days before the 26th were times of bustle and haste. The whole house was rendered immaculate. Pies and cakes were baked, and of course an abundance of bread. The churning was put off a day or so, that the butter might be quite fresh for the great occasion. The day before, the chickens were picked, drawn, cut up and put away in deep stone crocks in the spring-house, ready to be stewed for the wedding supper.

Betsy was finding some surcease from her heartache in the unusual excitement of the preparations, and in

the new freedom with which she might now talk to Mr. Richards. Each time she called him "James," a thrill went over her. But Liza Jane's face was still stony, and she spoke only when it was necessary.

The wedding day dawned clear, after a showery week. Jeannie, opening her gray eyes wide, peered out of her eaves window and saw a golden sunrise in the east. She sprang from the bed and hurried into the next room.

"Girls!" she cried. "Look, it's going to be a pretty day!"

Liza Jane and Betsy, already up and dressing, were smitten, each of them by a new pain which until now the greater one in their hearts had quite overborne. All at once they realised that after another day or two there would be no Jeannie in the little room adjoining, no gay voice singing "Camptown Races," or "Billy Boy," as they dressed, no happy young face to come bursting in upon them each morning. Liza Jane did an unprecedented thing. She walked swiftly over to her young sister and kissed her.

"We'll miss you something terrible, Jeannie."

"Oh, but I'll come home often. James has promised me. I'll get homesick for you all. And, girls, listen. When James gets his first charge, you're both to come and visit. Think of sitting in the minister's pew at church and everybody looking at you! Won't it be fine? I know I'll have to pray hard to keep from getting stuck up!"

Every one seemed moving in an unnatural world as the day went on. The words kept running in Sarah's mind like a strange dream. "We're getting ready for Jeannie's wedding. We're—getting ready—for *Jeannie's wedding*." It could not be true, and yet. . . .

"Liza Jane," she said in a low tone, "could you and Betsy fix up the spare room, Mr. Richards' room? You know. . . . Make the bed up fresh and put on the pillow-



slips with the lace edge." Her voice went to a whisper. "And better put one of Jeannie's new nightgowns in there. Just fold it up and slip it under the quilt. In the excitement to-night it might be forgotten."

"Mother, you do that, and I'll finish up in the kitchen——"

"No, you girls fix things upstairs. I know just where I'm at with the work here."

It was very still in the big spare room while the girls' hands prepared the bridal bed.

David and Mr. Richards moved the long eating table from the kitchen to the sitting-room, and fetched and carried at Sarah's direction. She unfolded the long cloth that had never been out since the day of her mother's funeral, and spread it on carefully. There were special dishes on the top shelf of the sitting-room cupboard which David handed down to her. Mrs. Forsythe was bringing over her plated knives and forks to help out. Sarah herself went carefully through the jellies and preserves, finally setting out the choicest to be opened later.

"Liz McKinstrie is coming to help in the kitchen," she said. "I hated to ask her, David, but the poor soul has been up three times begging to come, so I gave in. Then Terese is going to help Liza Jane and Betsy wait on the table. I thought you'd better sit down, David, to please Jeannie."

"I'd just as leave wait," he said.

"Well, you see there won't be a big crowd at the supper. Just the Forsythes, the Hendersons, the Browns, Granny McCleester, Dr. McFeeters and Mrs., and the bride and groom and your father. I don't know whether I'll sit down or not. I guess I will. But, you see, that would make thirteen. You'd better sit down, too, David. There'll be a place for you. Now bring the bench in, you and James, and put it here at the upper side of the table. We won't have chairs enough, I'm afraid."



At three o'clock the Forsythes arrived. Mr. Richards, already dressed in his freshly-pressed Sunday suit, went out to meet them. Big Bob detained him outside, after the women had gone in.

"I just want to wish you happiness, though I'm sure you'll have it all right! If I had a daughter I'd rather give her to you than any man I've ever seen. Yes, sir! You know, one reason I've always had a fancy for you is because you're a preacher an' yet you've never even mentioned to me that I've got a soul. I'm sort of touchy about havin' my soul fussed over."

Big Bob leaned back comfortably on his heels. "There was a young feller from the Seminary out here oncet, some years back, supplyin', while Dr. McFeeters was down sick. He was a nice young feller, but awful solemn. He'd heard I didn't go in very heavy for church-goin', so he'd light down on me whenever he'd see me an' start talkin' religion. Sort of stuck in my craw, somehow, things he said.

"One day he hails me on the road, an' I had to stop my team. 'Mr. Forsythe,' he says, 'do you ever think of where you'll spend eternity?' he says. 'Why, yes,' says I. 'I'm thinkin' it over, but I can't jist decide which place I want to go.' 'You can't decide?' he says, lookin' like he was goin' to swaller me. 'What do you mean?' 'Well,' says I, 'I've heard it's heaven for climate an' hell for company, so I ain't sure,' I says, an' drove on. That settled him. He never bothered me again after that."

When Big Bob's roar of laughter had died away, he himself turned serious.

"But here's wishin' you well again. You're doin' the best thing a young man can do. There ain't nothin' sweeter than the feel of the woman you love in your arms. There's nothin' worth barterin' for that. At least them's *my* sentiments!"

Meanwhile, up in their virginal rooms, the three sisters dressed together for the last time. Liza Jane and Betsy wore their last spring's bombazines refurbished now with the laces and jewellery they had worn to singing school. Jeannie dressed without help, though she found her own little mirror too small for her to see the full splendour of the sprigged silk. She came into the girls' room to view herself and to fasten the black velvet band in her curls. Her face seemed fairer than it had ever done before. Sarah, coming into the room nervously to see how they were getting on, stared a moment at Jeannie as she flashed about to show herself, and then felt the quick rush of tears.

"Turn round," she said with mother guile, "till I see the back."

When Jeannie again faced her Sarah's eyes were dry.

"James is coming up, Jeannie, and he'll stay with you in the upper hall till the folks have all gathered in the parlour. Then when some one signs to you, you can come right down. And be sure to walk clear to the far corner and then turn round like you did last night. That'll give more room for Dr. McFeeters. My, the dress turned out well! You all look fine," she added, trying hard to include the other girls in Jeannie's great day.

They went downstairs together, leaving Jeannie in the hall with James. He smiled at them, but poor Liza Jane and Betsy, glancing back, saw his eyes as he looked down into the face of his bride!

Below, beside the parlour door, David was stationed. He had grown taller during the winter, and heavier, too. He looked a man now. And it was a man's heart that ached within him. The lonely thought of parting from Jeannie was not all. He had seen Terese as she came in. He could see her now if he turned his head. And all the old struggle was upon him again. Just the sight

of her sent a hot longing over him. But over against that were the words of Dr. Donaldson. "If you keep a clear and single mind upon your work, David, I predict that some day you will be at the head of your profession." That was going to be the law. And David knew that Terese had spoken the truth when she said that lawyers did not marry bound girls. His mother suddenly caught his eye and nodded to him. It was time. He moved to the foot of the stairs and signalled to the waiting pair, who started down. Dr. McFeeters in his shiny, long-tailed black coat, stood up in the far corner of the parlour in front of the whatnot. The rest of the company rose. James with Jeannie on his arm paused a moment at the parlour door, then, with all eyes upon them, walked slowly across the room. There was a soft little intaking of breaths at the sight of them. Granny McCleester leaned towards Mrs. Henderson.

"As God is my judge, yon's the bonniest couple I've seen in a lifetime!" she whispered.

The ceremony consisted of a long opening prayer, a brief discourse upon the solemnity and the duties of marriage, the taking of the vows, then another prayer and the benediction. During the latter, Granny McCleester, "keekin'" through her fingers, and David, standing unbowed by the door, both saw something which did not usually happen at weddings. They saw James bend over and kiss his wife upon the lips.

Then all at once there was a buzz and stir in the room, everybody crowding towards the bride and groom, the women a little teary and excited, the men awkward and jocular.

Supper was served at five. Tender fried chicken, mashed potatoes, swimming bowls of gravy, coleslaw, dried apples, great plates of bread, rolls of the fresh butter, jellies and jams, with pie and cake and canned peaches following. Every one pronounced it a sumptuous

meal, and Sarah's housewifely soul was satisfied. The women praised the cooking, and the men, protesting that they could eat no more, still helped themselves again as the girls, waiting on the table, pressed food upon them.

When the meal was at last over, Daniel and David went quietly up the back stairs and came down in their everyday clothes. The evening work at the barn had to be done, wedding or no wedding. Meantime Sarah had donned a big apron, and was preparing to wait on "the second table," which consisted of Liza Jane, Betsy, Terese, and Liz McKinstrie. Mrs. Henderson and Mrs. Brown, capable and kindly, bustled about, too, clearing up the kitchen. Granny McCleester was entertaining the bride and groom in a corner of the sitting-room, with old Dr. McFeeters and Mrs. McFeeters looking on.

By seven o'clock a transformation had been effected by many pairs of willing hands. The sitting-room was cleared of the big table and all signs of the recent feast. The kitchen was in order. The women had doffed their aprons, washed their hands in the basin on the kitchen bench, smoothed their hair, and were ready for the evening. The men had strolled out to the barn, looked at the young calf, discussed the weather and the oats planting, and now came through the kitchen, feeling somehow more at ease. After Dr. and Mrs. McFeeters had taken their early departure, a general relaxation was apparent. Big Bob chucked Jeannie under the chin and told her she was the prettiest bride he'd seen since his own wedding day, then slapped Mr. Richards' shoulder and made a remark behind his hand. Mrs. Brown, heavily playful, asked of Liza Jane and Betsy what they meant by letting their little sister get ahead of them and walk off with such a fine "catch."

"And men as scarce as hen's teeth."

"Well," Mrs. Henderson put in kindly, "there's luck

in leisure, ain't there, girls? And if you can't get a good man there's no sense drivin' your pigs to a poor market like some do."

Suddenly there was a rattle of wheels and sounds of voices outside.

"Them's the young folks comin', I'll bet," said Mrs. Brown. "Billy's bringin' Matilda, an' Ben's bringin' Jennie."

David hurried out to help with the horses. In a few minutes the sitting-room swarmed with new guests, and as still more and more came, the older folks retreated to the corners to chat comfortably and watch the fun. Daniel came out of his normally serious shell and laughed and joked with the young folks. It was he who started the games going with "Spin the Pan."

"Oh, let's sell the forfeits over Father's head," Jeannie cried eagerly. "He can think of such good fines."

"Heavy, heavy, what hangs overhead?"

"Fine or superfine?"

"Superfine. What shall be done with the owner?"

Daniel outdid himself in invention. The laughter grew louder. A gale of merriment swept through the house. David, standing by Terese, pressed her hand, when no one saw, and drew her nearer to him.

"Come out in the kitchen," he whispered.

The kitchen was dark. He took her in his arms.

"Have you changed about the law, Davy?"

"I can't, Terese."

"Then it's all as bad as ever for us."

"Oh, don't let's argue, Terese. Everybody's happy to-night. Let's us be, too. I couldn't wait to see you. . . . I keep thinking of you."

She clung to him. "An' I've been so homesick for you, Davy, every day, every night. Hold me closer now—just this once——"

"David! Where's David? It's his turn to spin!"



David went back alone, and later Terese followed, unobserved.

And the fun went on. At ten o'clock every one sat down while the older women, helping Sarah, passed great plates of rich pound cake and cookies and apples. There was coffee, too, for those who wanted it.

Sarah noticed as she moved about that Jeannie's high colour had left her. She looked tired and a little pale. Mr. Richards had been all evening the personification of joyous pride. When he had to be away from Jeannie's side for even a moment in the games, his dark eyes, full ablaze, followed her.

It was when all the guests had at last given their final good-byes and well-wishes to the bride and groom and most of them were gone, that Sarah suddenly missed Jeannie. Mr. Richards for the moment was busy with Mr. Henderson and Mr. Forsythe over some business connected with the school. In the hall there was a confusion of locating the last shawls and bonnets. Liza Jane and Betsy were there assisting, but no Jeannie. Sarah looked stealthily about. She was not in the parlour nor yet in the kitchen.

With a quick glance over her shoulder, Sarah went up the back stairs, a queer premonition of what she would find coming over her. In the back hall a faint sound struck her ear. She followed it, through Liza Jane and Betsy's room, into Jeannie's own small chamber. It was dark, but through the window a pale moonlight showed a form in the narrow bed.

"Jeannie!"

Jeannie raised her head.

"Mother, it's you! Oh, mother, please let me sleep here in my own bed! All at once downstairs I felt strange about—about the spare room. I don't want to go there. Not to-night, anyway. Mother, please don't make me." There was a terror in her tone.



Sarah stood, stricken with uncertainty.

"My child, you can't shame your husband this way on your wedding night!"

"But, Mother, please don't make me. I'm—I'm sort of afraid. Prissy Hidden—she said such queer things one day she was fitting me. . . . They just came back to me downstairs there when the folks were leaving. Oh, Mother, *please* let me stay here!"

Sarah's lips shut tight. "I wish that woman had never darkened our door," she muttered. Then she stood very still, thinking.

At last she said slowly: "Stay where you are, then, Jeannie. I'll arrange things as well as I can." She stooped and kissed her child. "God grant you may know happiness in your marriage, Jeannie, and I'm sure you will."

She moved softly about in the next room, over to the spare room, back again. Then she went downstairs. She met Mr. Richards in the kitchen. His face was still flushed and alight.

"Is Jeannie—has she gone on up?" he asked her softly.

Sarah could hear Daniel and David and the girls still busy in the parlour and sitting-room, setting things to rights. She motioned to James quietly and led the way up the back stairs again. In the darkness of the upper hall she stopped.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked anxiously.

She told him in whispers, hesitating, worried, embarrassed.

"I've been at fault, mebbe, for not speaking with her. . . . She's such a child yet—but I'm mortified now——"

She felt James Richards' hand upon her shoulder.

"Don't worry," he said. "I understand. I'll always think of her first. I'll take care of her, never fear."

"I know you will," Sarah said brokenly. "I've put

your things in here in the girls' room. I thought it would look better. . . . They can go into the spare room. You'll find a candle on the bureau and matches——"

"Everything will be all right. Will you say good-night to the rest? And thank you all for the fine wedding."

He opened the door and went inside, closing it carefully behind him. He stood for a moment getting used to the darkness, then made his way to the bureau and lighted the candle. As he did so, a startled voice from the next room spoke.

"Liza Jane, is that you?"

He went in and knelt beside the low bed, putting his arms about her. He could feel her body stiffen.

"I only came to say good-night, Jeannie. Then you must go asleep quickly and rest up from all the excitement. Didn't we have a nice wedding?"

He felt her relax suddenly. Her arms crept round his neck.

"Wasn't it fun? Did you like my dress?"

"It was the loveliest I've ever seen. You must always keep it."

"You'll have our names put in the ring later, won't you?"

"Yes, as soon as ever we get to the city."

"James?"

"Yes, darling."

"Have I—have I *shamed* you to-night?"

"Why, how could you?"

"Mother said if I didn't—if I stayed here by myself——"

He drew her closer. "I won't be far away. I'll be in the girls' room. This is such a cosy little place here, and you're so used to it. You want to stay in it as long as you can before you leave it for good, don't you?"

She raised her eyes wonderingly.

"You *understand*, James?"

"Of course."

She snuggled her head against his shoulder. "I love you so."

"That's all I ask. And now, good-night."

He kissed her. But he fought his passion down. Jeannie felt only the tenderness.

When he was back in the other room he removed his black coat and hung it carefully on a chair, then untied his flowing silk tie and folded it mechanically. As he was struggling with his high white collar he heard Jeannie's voice.

"James?"

In a second he was beside her, trembling with eagerness.

"Yes," he breathed. "Yes, darling."

Jeannie's words came drowsily.

"James, you'd better lie at the front of the girls' bed. The cords are weak on Betsy's side."

"Yes, Jeannie, I will."

He pulled himself together, kissed her gently, and went back to his undressing, a smile twitching his lips.

When he was ready for bed he tiptoed again into Jeannie's room. She was already asleep, lying as a child would lie with her arms thrown above her head, her short brown curls tumbled upon the pillow. He stood for a long time watching her before he turned back into the other room.

The big house was slow in settling to quiet that night. David, young and tired as he was, tossed and turned upon his straw tick, his thoughts making the same torturing round they always did when Terese was the subject of them. Daniel in his room was wakeful and talkative. He had an unusual feeling of satisfaction and decent pride. His daughter had married a man head and shoulders above any other in the community. The wedding had been a scene of full-hearted hospitality for their neighbours and friends. It had not been often in his life that Daniel had experienced such a sense of

successful accomplishment either for himself or for his children. He lay now in the darkness, talking it over with Sarah. She talked, too, but her heart was with Jeannie and James. She had not dared tell Daniel about the sudden change in the sleeping arrangements. He would never understand, or forgive the irregularity. He and James were made of such different clay.

But at last David's tossing ceased; Daniel, too, fell asleep, and finally Sarah. The spring darkness lay lightly upon the earth. A faint odour of lilacs, such as had filled the air on the night of Jeannie's birth, drifted on the wind. There was the faint throaty ripple of the Whitethorn and the distant bay of a dog from over the hills. The night wore on. When the clock downstairs struck two, Liza Jane, lying with set eyes on the open window, heard a sharp, suppressed sound behind her. She turned quickly.

"Betsy, ain't you asleep yet?"

"No. Liza Jane, it's fair cruel the way things are."

"Cruel enough."

"Think of her not being willing—and us that would die almost for sake to lie in his arms——"

"Hush, Betsy."

"I wouldn't mind it so much in our own room, but in here it's past bearing, somehow."

"Turn your pillow over to the cool side. That'll help your head if it aches. Now try to go to sleep, Betsy."

"Put your arm round me."

✧ "There."

When the stroke of three echoed through the room that had been destined for the bridal chamber, Liza Jane, listening sharply, heard Betsy's breathing at last become easy and regular. But the first pink of dawn had touched the top of the great sugar maples before she, too, fell asleep.

INTERLUDE

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD

1882





## INTERLUDE

DANIEL BROUGHT THE LETTER FROM THE POST OFFICE on a bright March day. Sarah grasped it eagerly and sat down in the kitchen rocker. Jeannie's letters were the bright spots of her life. She always opened the envelope with fingers that trembled a little, and leafed through the pages to see how many there were. She called now to Betsy.

"Hand me my glasses from the sitting-room mantel, and we'll see what Jeannie has to say. I'm afraid it's a short one this time."

Daniel went back to the barn, bent now, and slow in his walk. He would hear the news later. Liza Jane hurried down the stairs at Betsy's call, and together they listened as Sarah read:

DEAR MOTHER:

"You always said I couldn't keep a secret long. Well, I've kept one this time! Mother, I've passed my eighth month and I'm just fine. All the other times when things went wrong I was so weak and miserable. This time I've felt well all the way through. And Mother, I'm coming home for the baby to be born. The doctor here says nothing can hurt me now. So we're starting Wednesday. James says we'll stay over night in New Salem at the Hotel, and get a carriage there to take us out the next day so Father won't have to bother, and it will be easier riding in a livery rig. I won't write more now, we'll see you so soon. Mother, isn't it wonderful! I can't believe it myself!

Love from

JEANNIE.

Sarah leaned back weakly in the rocker.

"Will wonders never cease!" she said, and then fell to weeping quietly.

"Of all things under the sun!" Betsy ejaculated, "and them married twelve years in April. Why, it don't seem credible. And to think of her making the trip home in that condition—going in trains and carriages where people can see her. If that ain't like Jeannie never to care! You'd think James wouldn't allow her."

"James!" said Liza Jane sharply. "He'd take her to the moon if she wanted to go. You ought to know that by this time. Well, we surely got news in that letter! I think I'll start cleaning the spare room right away. There's no time to waste. Now, Mother, don't you get all worked up. You don't want to take a heart spell on the head of it."

"Oh, if she just gets through it safe!" Sarah said, wiping her eyes. "Of course I was a good deal older than that when she was born herself, but I'd had eleven before her. That makes all the difference. I think, girls, I'll get one of you to take me in to New Salem to-morrow, and I'll speak to the young doctor there. They say he's good at confinements. Well, well, so at long last Jeannie's going to nurse! I doubt we'll not have our minds much on our work *this* day."

"We've surely had two big shocks this spring," Betsy said. "First about David, and now this."

"I believe I'll drop David a line right off," Sarah said thoughtfully, "and ask him to come home for over next Sabbath. It would mebbe be the last time we could all be together just ourselves. After he's married he'll have to bring his wife, of course, and while I know we'll like her, it won't be the same, quite. We'll feel a little stiff for a while, knowing she's a judge's daughter and all. Yes, I'll write David, but I won't tell him a word about Jeannie till he gets here."

It was nearly eleven on Thursday when the carriage

drove up the lane. Sarah, in her best white apron, had been watching at the sitting-room window for an hour. Liza Jane and Betsy had made her sit down for fear in the excitement she would overdo.

When Jeannie was at last in her arms, Sarah's tears flowed unchecked. The joy of the reunion, with the new joy added, was too much to bear dry-eyed. Jeannie clung to her, whispering eager fragments in her ear.

"I've got all the little clothes made, Mother. . . . I could hardly keep from telling you sooner—but I wanted to be sure this time. Everybody's been so good to me. . . . My neighbours think, the way I've carried it, it's going to be a girl. James doesn't care which, but I'd like a girl— Oh, Mother!"

They got the travellers seated at last in the two best rockers. Jeannie's little curls were brushed up now and crowned with a coiled "switch" on top of her head, but they still escaped in incorrigible ringlets at her temples. Her cheeks were sweetly rounded, and the eager light in her eyes was as bright as in her girlhood. Life had left the essential joyous youth of her untouched.

James had patches of gray now at his temples and some added lines in his face, but he was still a strong man in his prime.

Out in the kitchen, while they dished up the dinner, Betsy spoke to Liza Jane.

"I declare he's worse than ever. Look at him! Can't keep his eyes off her. You'd think, after all these years— Waits on her hand and foot. . . . There, he's gettin' her a cushion for her back——"

The wistfulness in Betsy's voice did not escape her sister.

"Oh, well, among them be it!" Liza Jane said briefly. "You can call them to dinner now."

Sarah had told Jeannie of the possibility of David's coming, but no one was prepared for the sound of buggy

wheels in the lane before they had finished eating. The kitchen door opened with a rush, and David himself, travelling-bag in hand, was facing them.

"So you did beat me here! I tried my best to get to New Salem before you left. Well, well, *Jeannie!*"

She had risen and rushed towards him, tripping in her eagerness. He caught her safely to him and kissed her.

"Oh, Davy, now you're here everything's perfect! Listen! Bend your head down—I want to whisper a secret."

But instead David smiled, eyeing her with his old tenderness.

"Give me three tries, and maybe I can guess it!" he said. Then they laughed together as they used to do, while Betsy blushed and Liza Jane looked primmer than usual.

"I declare, Jeannie has no sense of shame or decency. She'll never really grow up," each was thinking.

They set a place for David when the rest of the greetings were over, and the table was complete.

David seemed to bring a new atmosphere with him. He was a large man now, broad shouldered, handsome, and well groomed. He even smelled "cityish," as Jeannie put it—a mingled masculine aroma of moth balls and good cigars and hair tonic. Daniel and Sarah looked at him with pride mingled with awe. Not even their ambitious dreams had kept pace with David's success. Sarah kept all the clippings from the paper in which his name was mentioned, in her Bible.

It was a happy afternoon, even for Liza Jane and Betsy. They all sat around the fire, talking of the old days and the new. David's wedding was not to be till the fall. He would bring Margaret out soon to see them, he said. Jeannie watched him carefully as he spoke of her. Later, when they went for a walk around the barn, she brought the subject up again.

"You love her terribly, David?"

"Of course. She's a fine girl. She's very handsome, too."

"Do you love her like James loves me?"

"Oh, now, Jeannie!" David laughed. "You can't expect every couple to be like you and James."

"I don't see why." Then she gave his arm a little squeeze. "I hope she makes you awfully happy, Davy."

"Why, of course she will," he said, but he turned his eyes away from the sugar meadow as he spoke and began to tell of a novel he had just finished reading.

It was in the evening that Daniel mentioned Big Bob's barn-raising the next day. It had been set for Tuesday, but some of the lumber had not arrived in time.

"It's to be a big day. All the able-bodied men round are invited. And they all know what a spread Mrs. Forsythe will set them down to for dinner! Big Bob told me to be sure to bring David and James if they got here in time. I'm not much on a lift now, myself; so, if you two young fellows will come, that'll hold up our end of things."

"Fine!" James said. "Why, that's just the sort of thing I need: some good physical exercise. I'll be glad to see Mr. Forsythe again, too. Fine! What do you say, David?"

David hesitated. For reasons of his own he wished to keep clear of the Forsythes, but he could scarcely refuse.

"Of course, I'll help, too, what I can. It's a long time since I've been at a barn-raising. I thought the carpenters did all that now."

"They do some places," Daniel said. "But you know how Robert does like a frolic; so he's going to have everything the old-fashioned way."

James was particularly eager for the event. He doubled up his arms and made Jeannie feel his muscle.

"It isn't all from pounding the pulpit, either," he declared.

"It's from beating his wife," David said, and they all laughed together uproariously.

Daniel's prayer that night was a pure pæan of thanksgiving, with only one brief petition for the long-absent one.

The next morning there was much chaffing among the men as they prepared for an early start after breakfast. James's high spirits were infectious. Jeannie followed them out on the porch to wave them off. James made an excuse to come back for something and kissed her again as he stood on the step.

"Mind you all be careful," Sarah called from the door.

The morning went quickly for the women. At eleven o'clock they were seated around the table in the kitchen, examining the tiny garments Jeannie had spread out for their inspection. Liza Jane looked up suddenly.

"Why, what's bringing David home at this hour—riding the Forsythes' colt, too?"

Sarah sprang up. "It'll be mebbe something wrong with Father. I knew he oughtn't to lift——"

David entered the kitchen and faced them, his face stone-white.

"*David!* What is it?" Sarah cried.

But David did not answer. He looked helplessly from one to the other; then he walked over to Jeannie and caught her hands.

"Sit down, Jeannie," he said huskily.

But Jeannie only gripped his arms. Her face had gone white, but her eyes looked straight into his. Their thoughts had always been curiously open to each other.

"Tell me," she said. "Is it *James*?"

He nodded. She did not move, only kept looking into his stricken eyes.

"Is he—dead?"

David nodded again. He could not speak.

It was Liza Jane who screamed and Betsy who half



swooned beside the table. Sarah sank weakly down in her chair, her hand on her heart. But Jeannie made no sound. No quiver touched her lips. She stood, supporting herself by David's arms. She spoke at last.

"Was it—*instant*?"

David could not see her face for the tears that tore their way across his own eyeballs, but he kept his voice from shaking.

"Yes. A falling beam. Big Bob tried to save him. . . ."

When they brought the body home, the feet of the men who bore it were heavy on the small front porch, then in the hall, then the parlour.

The men came out awkwardly, to speak to the family in the sitting-room. Hendry McCleester and Mr. Henderson said they would come back to sit up with whoever was keeping watch that night. At last they were gone. Mrs. Henderson and Prudence McCleester, who had come as soon as they had heard the news, moved about in the kitchen.

Jeannie sat in the rocking-chair close to the sitting-room grate, far beyond outcry, far beyond tears. She heard the neighbour women's low voices in the kitchen:

"Stunned, poor child. She'll realise it later. . . . I suppose they'll want us to wash the body."

It was then Jeannie cried out. David and her mother hurried to her. Her eyes locked up piteously into theirs.

"Mother, I couldn't stand it for strangers' hands to touch him. Couldn't you and the girls——?"

"Of course," Sarah said brokenly. "Of course, child."

So it was Sarah and the girls who shut themselves in the silent parlour with the dead. But Sarah found she could not help. It was the hands of Liza Jane and Betsy that tenderly touched the flesh, at last, of the man they both had loved.

They all knew now, except Jeannie, that the tragedy

had been a double one. When the great beam crashed, Big Bob, seeing the danger, had hurled his huge frame forward in an effort to save his friend. David had bent above him a few moments later as he lay on the grass. Big Bob had slowly opened his eyes. Speech was difficult.

"Is—Mr. Richards—safe?"

"Safe," David answered, choking.

The gay and gallant soul of Big Bob refused to leave life sombrely. He smiled painfully up at David, and winked.

"'Bout run out of—stories, Dave. . . . Mebbe hear—some new ones—over there——"

Mrs. Forsythe and Terese had come running. David had turned away, to start on his desperate errand home.

After the supper, which no one could touch, a spasm of pain crossed Jeannie's face. As she bowed forward suddenly, Sarah spoke to David.

"I was afraid of this. Better start now, David, for New Salem. It's the *young* doctor, mind. And get back as soon as you can."

There were delays, however. It was one o'clock, and the March wind was eerie, when David finally drove up to the house and hurried the doctor in. Sarah met him nervously at the foot of the stairs. Her face looked very old.

"She's bad, doctor," she whispered.

David looked in at the parlour door. His father and the other men were there with the dead. He was not needed. He slowly climbed the stairs, got a chair from his mother's room, and sat down in the upper hall.

And the March wind went crying into the dawn.

Then, with the first breaking light, there was a new cry upon the earth. Out of the anguished pains of the night time Jeannie's child had been born.

Sarah stumbled out to the hallway where David was sitting, his head in his hands.

"It's over," she said. "A girl."

"And Jeannie?"

Sarah shook her head.

"I don't know. It was touch and go all night. The doctor wasn't sure he could save them both. But I think she'll come through safe now."

She went on down to the kitchen to tell the girls, waiting, shivering and desolate, trying to numb their hearts with the familiar task of making coffee for the watchers.

David waited on. It seemed dully to him that some one must keep vigil here, even as his father and the other men kept their watch in the still front room below.

The doctor opened the door. "She wants you," he said.

David felt a nausea sweep him. He feared to draw near to the processes of birth more than he had to the scene of death. But he could not fail Jeannie. He went in softly. Mrs. Henderson was busy before the fire with a basin and many little cloths and garments. David walked unsteadily to the bed. Jeannie's face was blanched, and the little brown curls were wet from the sweat of her travail. He whispered her name, and she opened wide eyes.

"Davy," she said weakly, "what was the name of the girl in that novel you were telling me about last night?"

"Constance."

Jeannie seemed to relax.

"That's it. I couldn't think. I'll call her that. For I can never forget, Davy. Not a look or a word. Constance! If he knows, he'll understand it's for him. Now go, Davy, and get some sleep."

David stood a moment longer, a sharp ache in his heart. For he realised that in this room, while the child Constance had been a-borning, the child Jeannie had died for ever. A woman dwelt now in her stead.



BOOK TWO

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD

1904





## CHAPTER ONE

THE MCDOWELL GIRLS, AS ALL NEW SALEM CALLED them, had built their red brick house on the pleasantest of the town's three long streets. Main Street itself was the most important. Beginning, technically, on the top of Masters Hill as a narrow, dusty country road, with a scattering of houses at either side, it descended, gaining in population and in dignity, until it became a wide, tree-lined thoroughfare, bordered with close-set houses—most of them with inquisitive front porches projecting into the sidewalk—and attained at last the centre of town life: the post office, the barber shop, the bank, the old Stone Hotel and Galloway's. Beyond this, as though realising that its real eminence had been reached, it began to creep slowly downhill, finally reaching the long covered wooden bridge that spanned the Loyalhanna. Then its identity as a street disappeared. It became again merely the Greensburg road.

The other two streets of the town ran parallel on either side of Main Street. Gay Street stretched its rather sparse length to the north of it. True, the blacksmith shop was there, which made it sound heartsome enough in the daytime. But at night it was very dark and quiet. No chance travellers ever drove down that way, probably because the road into it was always so rough and stony. Moreover, the quiet may have been accentuated by the fact that just behind on a sloping hill lay the cemetery of New Salem. Sometimes in the evening afterglow, when all the white stones stood out distinctly, the population of the little town seemed to dwindle before this larger city on the hill.

But Dame Street, to the south, where the McDowell girls lived, was different. It had an importance of its own, for the three churches of the town stood upon it. With an apparent eagerness for proximity, not entirely borne out by their contentious theology, the Presbyterian, the Reformed Presbyterian, and the United Presbyterian congregations had built their structures on the three corners of the tiny square, formed where the short connecting street from Main ran into Dame and stopped.

This gave Dame Street a supreme distinction. The dwellers upon it could afford to stay quietly at home, knowing that all the town must come to them. Even to one more or less housebound, as Betsy McDowell had been for years, by rheumatism, there was always a gentle stir of diversion. On winter Sundays she could put on her "far-away" glasses and sit by the front window to watch the people coming to and from church. In summer, still better, she could sit on the porch and hear the music of the hymns and psalms borne on the warm air, or the rise and fall of the preachers' voices.

There was Wednesday night, too, with prayer meeting, and the sound of feet passing by after one was in bed: feet of those who had stayed late for committee meetings, perhaps, or choir practice. The mere sound of those passing feet never ceased to thrill Betsy, who for fifty years of her life had heard nothing in the night time except the lone call of a hoot-owl, or the far-off bay of a dog over the hills.

In the summer, when an occasional circus pitched its tent on the green behind the Reformed Presbyterian horse sheds, or when any one of the churches held a strawberry festival on its lawn, life seemed indeed almost hectic with interest!

There were practical advantages, too, connected with Dame Street of which Liza Jane approved. The residents there got less dust than those who lived on Main Street.

Besides, there were fewer flies than there were near the stores, where horses stood all day tied to the long rows of hitching posts.

But the reason the McDowell girls had built their house on its present site had been none of these. Rather it was because Jeannie, standing hesitant in the vacant lot which was now their backyard, had heard a faint, low ripple of water running over stones. It was the Loyalhanna curling below its high bank just behind, but it sounded like the Whitethorn. Then, lifting her eyes to a gap in the great oak trees that edged the creek bank, she saw what brought peace to her homesick heart. She saw in the distance, away beyond the Loyalhanna, a green pasture, a field of wheat, a woods that looked like the old sugar meadow. Turning towards the older girls, she had said beseechingly, "Oh, *please* let's buy here!" That had been twenty years ago.

Liza Jane was in the seventies now, though no one in New Salem except Terese, who with Mrs. Forsythe had moved to town soon after the McDowell girls, knew it. Liza Jane was still thin and straight as a rush, and her tongue still sharp upon occasion. Being the oldest, she naturally took her place as the head of the family after Daniel and Sarah were gone. And now it was she who made the major decisions in the housekeeping: how many hens to set in the spring; how much soap to make in the fall; when it was too cloudy to hang out the washing.

Betsy, plumper than when she was younger and crippled uncomfortably from rheumatism, leaned more each year upon Liza Jane. Sometimes Jeannie grew anxious about it. "If Liza Jane were taken," she would whisper sometimes to Terese, "I'm afraid Betsy wouldn't be long behind her." They still slept together, the two older girls, waking sometimes in the night time to talk as Daniel and Sarah themselves had done.

"Did you hear what the clock struck last?"

"Three. Have you been awake long?"

"I heard it strike one. I guess I dozed off between. Did you mind to put the catch on the cellar door?"

"Yes, I sneaked it. . . . Liza Jane?"

"Yes."

"Do you mind the night at singin' school when we went in the sled and James carried us——?"

"Yes."

"They were happy days, weren't they? I often think about that winter. . . ."

"You'd better turn over and get to sleep. We've a big ironing to-morrow."

"What's that? It sounds like a buggy going past."

"Well, mebbe it is. Some young blade that stayed too late with his girl, I doubt."

"Oh, Liza Jane, doesn't it fair terrify you? The looseness of the times now and the temptations that beset the young people: the dancing and the card playing and all! Oh, if only *our* child is safe!"

"Well, we've got to do the best we can to influence her right and leave the rest with the Lord. Hist! There's the clock getting ready to strike!"

They would lie without breathing, counting.

"Four."

"Yes. We'd better try to doze off till six, anyway. Where's your hand?"

"Here."

But even though the older girls still held their own peculiar relationship to each other, and Jeannie, as always lived in another world, the difference now accentuated by the fact that she had known both a joy and a sorrow which the others could only imperfectly imagine, the three were bound together in the unity of an overpowering passion which, while they never

guessed it, verged upon idolatry. This was their love for the girl, Constance.

In those first blank weeks after James's sudden death, years before, Jeannie had laid dangerously passive even to the child she nursed at her bosom. Then on an April morning, as she still lay weak and white in the big square room where she herself had been born, a sudden burst of sunlight came through the window, touching the baby's soft hair to gold. For the first time Jeannie's attention was riveted upon the child. Her whole being, until now divided between this world and the next, became a unit of concentrated interest. She drew the baby closer as though for the first time to examine it. She saw then that it had James's broad brow and the shape of his head. Even its tiny hand was drawn not after the fashion of her own, but his. A living part of James's body and spirit then remained to her. Suddenly she clasped the child fiercely to her heart, and Sarah, herself haggard and frail with anxiety, had noted the change in Jeannie and slipped off downstairs to tell the older girls, "She'll get along now."

As to Liza Jane and Betsy, all the necessary repressions of their love for James had been removed, not only by his death, but by the fact that another natural object for their love had been given them, and this object linked inseparably with James himself. Something hard and steely in Liza Jane's heart melted as she touched the baby, while Betsy's full breasts throbbed, and in her loose fancy it was she who had conceived the child and borne it, so entirely did it seem her own.

All through her babyhood Constance scarcely knew which of the three was her mother. During her early childhood, too, she seemed to make her small demands indifferently upon them. But gradually, as her world became filled with ideas as well as objects, a change came. Betsy could bake her sugared cookies, and Liza



Jane could iron her small garments to smooth perfection; but it was Jeannie who sang "Billy Boy" to her or told her where the birds went in the fall. It was Jeannie's eager mind and the utter selflessness of her love that reached out to her child, until year by year they became as one flesh. The exquisiteness of their intimacy was a secret between them. Liza Jane and Betsy, wrapped in the more practical aspects of their adored one's welfare—such as food and sunbonnets and the shorter catechism—never quite guessed that in spirit she and her mother had slipped through a shining doorway and escaped them entirely.

At night, when the older girls believed the young Constance fast asleep, she was likely to be sitting on Jeannie's bed, a slim shape in the moonlight, her long dark braids mantling her shoulders, her arms about her knees, her eyes riveted upon her mother's eager face. Their minds met frankly, even when Constance was a girl in her first teens. David once, watching them, smiled teasingly and said, "You two have grown up together." The humour of which was lost entirely upon Betsy and Liza Jane.

But while in their nightly talks together Jeannie and her daughter discussed many more things than the philosophy of the older girls contained, there was one favourite subject that, year after year, grew in intensity of interest. It was an air castle, but one which literally had its foundations in the earth. It had to do with selling the coal under the old farm.

As far back as Daniel and Sarah's day there had been a phenomenon on one of the hillsides above the White-thorn. Below a sandstone ledge had been seeping springs. And a little way below these a curious blackish soil mixture. Once, as a boy, David had dug a tunnel through the crumbling black soil and retrieved a small lump of what appeared to be red coal. They had kept it for a



long time as a pleasant curiosity. In recent years the thought of its colour was less pleasant.

For gradually, as the new business of mining coal on a large scale spread over Westmoreland County, a great hope which had a chance of fulfilment, a dream that really had substance, caught hold of those who owned farms in the hills around Confluence. The coal companies were actually buying up the coal. Quiet, steady-going, meagre-living farmers were becoming moderately rich overnight. Even David thought it was only a question of time until operations reached the Whitethorn valley. And Jeannie, with the happy hopefulness that was part of her being, began to plan vividly for the days of plenty that lay just ahead. She confessed to Connie the hidden desire of her heart. It was to travel, to go to new and romantic places. Night after night she sketched in the details as she had read them in books, and the girl drank them in, wondering at the excited longing in her mother's face.

There would also, when the miracle happened, be money for new dresses and all sorts of comforts impossible now. One night Connie was startled at something in her mother's voice that sounded like a sob.

"Oh, to be fixed so that you needn't pinch a penny twice before you spend it! I hope I live to see the day!"

But just when hope had been highest, just after the Browns and the Hendersons and the Forsythes had all sold their coal, the McDowell vein was refused by the coal company. The reason given was that the farm was almost entirely underlaid by "crop coal," which meant *red coal* when it was mined. And this red coal, though it made as hot a fire as the black, was hard to sell.

It was a bitter blow, but David told them not to give up all hope. The crop coal *might* sell later. So Jeannie and Constance dreamed on.

But in the last year something had happened which made the whole situation more tense. A mine was now being worked actively on the Browns' old farm. It was known as Maida No. 1. The familiar farm fields were covered with slate heaps and tipples. A triple row of small ugly red houses for the "hunkies" spread themselves where the old orchard had been. A railroad extension had been built there. The face of the quiet country was scarred and changed almost beyond recognition in order that trainloads of soft coal might be sent out each day.

One thing more. The Confluence Creek, which in the old days had been a clear stream where the boys fished for bass, was now stained a reddish yellow, and all life in it was dead, because for six or seven years it had received the mine water.

Suddenly, though, as the mine had moved steadily forward beneath the Browns' and the McCleesters' and the Hendersons' fields, the coal company had been faced by a problem. It was becoming increasingly troublesome and expensive to pump the water to the mine mouth. Why not allow half of it to collect at the far end in a "sump," where it could be pumped up to the surface and discharged at that point? This had been done. They had put down a bore hole on the old Henderson place, just up the valley from the McDowell farm, pumped up the water and discharged it—into the White-thorn!

At first no breath of all this had reached the McDowell girls. Then one day Andy Given, their renter, had appeared at the back door. His visits usually meant trouble of some sort. The house roof had sprung a leak, the kitchen flue needed repairing, or the barn floor doors were sagging.

But this day he was really excited. He told them briefly of the situation. The stock had to be watered

from the well. The pasture meadow looked sick. The whole thing was serious, and if it kept up they'd have to look for a new renter—unless, of course, they'd make it worth his while to stay on.

It had been a sad night.

"The poor cows," Betsy had lamented, "with no stream to drink from!"

"I think it's poor us!" Jeannie said with a little shudder. "It's all we can do now to live on our rent, and if we have to take still less from Andy Given, it's going to mean tight squeezing."

But then, as always, Jeannie's countenance brightened with a hope.

"Why couldn't we sue the coal company? If they won't buy the farm for the coal, they've surely no right to damage it. Let's write to David at once and see what he says!"

But when David had come and gone over the whole situation he was very grave.

"This is bad," he said. "The pollution of the only stream of pure water running through a farm is a serious and substantial injury. You have a grievance there all right. But I fear it will get you nowhere. You see, this matter of a coal company's right to pollute a stream was gone into thoroughly in the Sanderson case, and the decision went to the coal company. I'm afraid you'd run up against a stone wall. However . . ."

Upon that "however" Jeannie lived. She knew that David had not given up entirely.

If they could win a suit from the coal company, it would probably mean selling the farm at a fine price and the coal, too. The hope, so small, was enough still to provide material for Jeannie and Constance in their nightly talks.

Connie now was a child no longer; she was twenty-two, and beautiful. The three women in their daily petitions

for her welfare never failed to include this earnest one: that Constance might never be vain of her looks.

"If it was just ourselves," Jeannie said to the other two one cold Friday afternoon in late November, "I would think we were blinded by love; but David's been round the world and back, and he said the last time he was here that Constance was one of the most *distinguished* looking beauties he had ever seen. He said she looked like a Burne-Jones angel."

"What's that next?" Liza Jane inquired tartly, as she rolled out pie dough.

"Oh, it's out of that big book he brought for Connie. Burne-Jones was an artist."

"I've no brew of artists," Liza Jane remarked. "They haven't good morals, any of them. And I know that book, too. I hid it in the attic. There are some pictures in it that aren't suitable for a young girl!"

Jeannie's eyes twinkled as she went on with her sewing. She had rescued many things for Connie through the years, that Liza Jane had considered "unsuitable."

Her face soon became grave, however.

"David worries about Connie. He says she's too pretty and too intelligent to be teaching a country school. But he says he has a horror of tampering with a life. And then he always ends up by asking if she has a beau."

"Well, you can easy answer that," Betsy put in primly from her quilting frames by the window. "You can always say that she goes out with young company but that she has no regular—admirer. She's too young for that anyway, and I hope David doesn't go putting ideas in her head."

"When I was her age I had been married three years," Jeannie said whimsically, "but I think times have changed. The girls don't marry so young now. Of course if she could find a man like James——"

"I doubt she'd have to travel far to find that," Betsy said and sighed.

Then she picked up her far-away glasses and peered out the window.

"There she is!" she announced at last. "She's just at the bend of the road now. You'd better get the meat on, Liza Jane!"

In a few minutes a sound of buggy wheels passed the house, turned into the drive at the side and passed on to the stable in the rear. Jeannie threw a shawl over her head and went along the broken stone walk to the back of the lot. Constance with quick, skilful movements was unhitching the horse in the buggy shed. She led him out of the shafts and into his stall in the stable, unharnessed him, threw a few forkfuls of hay into his manger and a scoopful of shorts into his feed box, stroked his nose, and then, gathering up a handful of books and papers, hurried to the stable door, where she met her mother. They kissed each other like surreptitious lovers—Betsy and Liza Jane were not demonstrative; then arm in arm they started slowly towards the house.

"Mother, what *do* you suppose?" the girl's voice was full of suppressed excitement.

"What, Connie?"

"Why, to-day, while the children were out at recess, Billy Brown drove up to the schoolhouse. And he wants to take me to a party at the McIlvaines' Friday night. I was so surprised. I said I'd go. Don't you think that was all right? But Billy Brown! Imagine! I didn't think he knew I was alive."

"Of all things!" Jeannie's voice held excitement, too. "Oh, you couldn't refuse on account of the families being such old friends and all. But at the McIlvaines'! Connie, it's sure to be a dance!"

"I know," the girl answered gravely. "That's what bothers me. But they'll have other games. And Billy



surely knows I wouldn't dance, so I didn't feel I deceived him to accept. Oh, Mother, I wish the church wasn't so down on dancing."

Jeannie sighed. "So do I. But since the minister and the Session have taken the stand they have, there's nothing to be done. Terese was over yesterday, and she said she heard that, if there's another big dance, they're going to take action. Oh, I hate to see it come. The young folks don't mean real harm by it. Well—we'd better go in. It's chilly standing here."

They went into the big, sweet-smelling kitchen, where Liza Jane was removing the pie from the oven and Betsy, having pushed back her quilting frame, was setting the table by the wide east window.

Jeannie, eager as always, gave the news away.

"Now, I'll have to get your new dress done by Friday. I had thought I'd have another week to finish it!"

"What's that?" said Liza Jane.

Jeannie and Constance laughed together, and the girl told her news. The flutter of it filled the big kitchen.

"Billy Brown! My, it seems no time since his father was courting Matilda Henderson! Well, I must say he's of as good family as any of the young men around," Betsy said, her lips twitching as she tried to show no emotion.

"Yes, as old Mrs. McCleester used to say, 'we kenned his granny,' and that's something. He'll be sure to drive a nice rig, too. The Browns are great for that. I only hope the horses aren't too wild." Liza Jane tried to be casual.

At the supper table, Jeannie, sitting opposite, watched the face of her child with an aching intentness. The thick brown braids were wound about her head coronet fashion. The slender face with James's dark eyes and long lashes, and Jeannie's own smile, shone with a delicate light, like an alabaster lamp that glowed and dimmed and



glowed again. Her movements were quick like Jeannie's own, but not like hers impetuous or headlong. Light and quick and sure she walked or ran. Her voice, too, was James's, low-pitched with a soft timbre. But her quick laughter, the dimple in her chin, and the sudden bright uplift of her head when she was interested, were all her mother's.

Jeannie watched the girl now covertly as she told the events of her day, her own mother heart busy with certain anxieties which her last talk with David had brought about. Was Constance, with her peculiar loveliness, to be wasted indefinitely on district schools? Even the thought of young Billy Brown upon the horizon was an added worry. For, with all Billy's substantial farm behind him, he would never, Jeannie knew, be a fit mate for Constance.

It was when Connie had finished the course at the village school of New Salem that David, on one of his visits, had had a long talk with Jeannie under the apple-tree

"She should have more school, Jeannie. I can manage it, if you're willing."

"Oh, David, that will be wonderful. She must have it, no matter how terribly I'll miss her. There will be the week-ends, though, to live for. You were thinking of Blairsville Seminary, I suppose?"

David looked at Jeannie's brave white face. Then he looked off over the creek bank.

"Why, yes. Yes, of course. The Sminary. That will be fine. I'll attend to it."

And Jeannie was never to know he had been thinking of Vassar.

Later that evening, when they were alone on the back porch, David spoke again of it as though he had just reached the end of a long train of thought.

"Yes, the Sminary. The older I get, Jeannie, the more I

wonder whether a life shouldn't perhaps be like a river—flowing along in the channel God gave it. Not too many radical deflections.”

Then with a twisted smile he added, “Making its own countryside fruitful, as it were.”

And Jeannie, not seeing the ironic sadness in his eyes, echoed, “Of course, David.”

So that fall, Constance, with a new trunk filled with Jeannie's careful sewing, had been driven the ten miles to Blairsville, and matriculated in the small Presbyterian nunnery where the very stones in the wall smelled of orthodoxy and the daughters of wealthy farmers and burghers learned their Latin under ladies of the old school.

When Constance graduated four years later she had acquired some really good knowledge of the classics, a modest poise, and a sublimated desire to be a foreign missionary. What she did, after several fruitless trips to near-by towns to interview strange and indifferent men known as “directors,” was to accept the position of teacher at District School No. 8 in Ferry Township. She had been there now for two years. And David, in spite of his theories, was growing restive over it, and communicating the feeling to Jeannie.

With her natural light-heartedness, however, she could throw it off completely at times, as she did now when they finished supper. Betsy and Liza Jane washed the dishes while Jeannie produced the new dress, which was somewhat of a triumph. It was made of a soft challis which Terese had bought for herself and then decided against. She had brought it over to see if there would be possibilities in it for Constance. And Jeannie with the dye-pot, of which she was a past mistress, had converted it into a most alluring shade of rose.

Connie threw aside her dark school dress now and put on the new one. Jeannie, her mouth full of pins, knelt on

the floor adjusting the hem, while Betsy and Liza Jane watched interestedly from the pantry. Connie herself could not see how the rose colour set off her smooth skin and the lustre of her dark eyes, but the others saw it. So intent were they all that they did not hear a footstep on the flagstones beneath the kitchen window, then on the back porch. Not till the door itself opened slowly did they all look up. A tall man in his fifties stood there: a handsome man, his dark hair still only slightly mixed with grey, his grooming perfect. His whole distinguished bearing seemed curiously out of place on the threshold of the plain kitchen. But Jeannie, after one glance, scrambled to her feet, scattering pins as she ran, to throw herself impulsively in his arms.

"David! And you never let us know! We've just eaten up every crumb of supper! How did you come out?"

David kissed her, and with an arm still about her, drew Constance towards him.

"Good gracious, young lady, you keep on getting prettier every time I see you! Little country schoolmarms shouldn't do that!"

He went over to kiss Liza Jane and Betsy, who always acted afterwards as though they had been guilty of an indiscretion. The older girls, indeed, had never been able to take David's success casually. To them, now that he was a judge, he was a strange and important man, coming from a different world. They marvelled at Jeannie, who saw him with the same adoring eyes as ever and stood in no slightest awe of him. So during his visits Liza Jane and Betsy attended strictly to the meals and let Jeannie do the visiting with their brother. Which arrangement, by the way, suited David perfectly, for over and above his lifelong devotion to Jeannie he had grown increasingly to respect the quality of her mind. He had talked more freely upon all subjects to Jeannie than he had done to any other living soul. Her eager and insatiable interest on the

one hand and her naïve intuition on the other provided him always with both stimulus and solace.

"Don't bother, girls, really," he was saying now. "I had my dinner in Greensburg. I got some one there to drive us out. I brought a man with me. He's down at the hotel now. I thought we might go out to-morrow and have a look at the farm——"

"David, *is it about the coal business?*" Jeannie burst out.

David tried to be casual.

"Oh, I don't suppose anything will ever come of it. I was just telling this lawyer the story of things there and he said he'd like to have a look at the place. Now, Jeannie, don't get excited. I don't think myself there is a chance in the world. There is the Sanderson case, as I've often told you——"

"Haven't you though! I'm sick hearing about the Sanderson case," Jeannie broke in.

"Well," David said, smiling, "let's talk of something else then. How about Connie here, and her new dress?"

Constance flushed, and Jeannie at once became all smiles.

"Isn't it pretty now? You'd never dream it came out of the dye-pot, would you, David? Tell him your news, Connie."

The girl stood before them, glowing in the rose dress. David was thinking: "Gad, what beauty, and what waste! And yet is it waste? There's the point we can't be sure of. But all the same I'd like to see her at an Assembly Ball!"

Constance was speaking in her low laughing voice.

"It's really nothing, Uncle David. There's to be a big party at the McIlvaines' Friday night, and Billy Brown has asked me to go with him. That's all."

"Billy Brown!" David echoed. "It seems only yesterday that his father was doing the beaung. I can remember the sound of his sleigh bells yet. Can't you, girls? Well, what about this young Billy? Is he a nice chap?"

"Oh, since they sold their coal, I suppose you'd call him the catch of the countryside," Jeannie said lightly. "Turn round, Connie, and I'll finish pinning up this hem. Then we can all go into the sitting-room."

The small square room opening from the big kitchen had the atmosphere of the old farmhouse. There was an open grate in which the big lumps of soft coal flamed and glowed deliciously. On the mantelpiece stood the old clock with the picture of the sun and its rays painted on the case door. The same stout rockers were there, and the lounge was against the wall just as it used to be, while on the centre table lay the very books their young eyes had been accustomed to: the large brown-backed Bible, which had been their mother's and their grandmother's before her; Young's *Night Thoughts*, Baxter's *Saint's Rest*, Pollok's *Course of Time* and the *National Gazetteer*. The new books that David was always sending, and that Jeannie and Constance read with avidity, were housed in a bookcase in the parlour. By common consent the sitting-room was kept faithful to the past. Only the Hagerstown Almanac changed year by year as Liza Jane purchased it to be her general guide. David picked it up later in the evening as he lounged comfortably in one of the rockers. His mouth twitched as he leafed the pages with their careful notations in Liza Jane's hand.

"Tell me, Liza Jane," he said after a few minutes, "when should you shingle a roof?"

"Why, in the dark of the moon, to be sure. Then the edges won't turn up."

"I see," David said with gravity. "And when is the best sign to plant potatoes?"

"The scales, I've always thought. The sign of the weight, you know. You'll get bigger potatoes."

"Um-hm. And when should you wean babies and calves and rabbits?"

"Why, when the signs the farthest from the heart——"



A giggle from Jeannie caused Liza Jane to reconsider the question.

"Ach, David, you're just making a fool of me!"

"No, really. This thing fascinates me. If it only told us exactly the right sign to be born and married and to die in, what a lot of trouble it would save!"

Something in his tone made Jeannie recall an omission.

"How is Margaret, Davy? We've never asked yet."

"Oh," he said with elaborate ease, "she's quite well, thanks. She's very busy just now with her Woman Suffrage work. She's at her office every day. I really see very little of her, as a matter of fact."

The words echoed in the small room and were lost in a strange silence. Even Jeannie was at a loss how to reply. David helped them by breaking the quiet himself.

"Well," he said rising, "I believe I'll take a walk down to the hotel and see how Harrington is getting on. Don't wait up for me. Just leave the back door open——"

"Wait till after prayers, Davy. We'd like you to," Jeannie said quickly.

And David sat down at once. "Of course. I forgot that. Go ahead, Liza Jane. I'll wait."

Liza Jane picked up the large brown book.

"We're getting very lax at night," she said. "We just read a psalm. It seems easier when we're all sleepy. I don't know what Father would think."

"Frightfully lax," David said, smiling. "I don't know how your consciences allow it! What about the Ninetieth then to-night, Liza Jane? I haven't heard that for a long time."

"Shame on you, Davy!" Jeannie put in gently, while David merely caressed her with his eyes.

Liza Jane had no difficulty finding the place, as the book always fell open there of itself. Her voice at family prayers was curiously like Daniel's own had been.



“‘Lord, Thou has been our dwelling place in all generations. . . .’”

When the psalm was finished she reached for a thin book and read a prayer from it. The book had been a concession to the fact that all three girls felt a shyness about speaking their own petitions aloud. David had found the little volume at Jeannie's request. At first Liza Jane had sniffed it suspiciously. Her thin Calvinistic nose had scented Catholicism, or at least Episcopacy upon it. But after a perusal she had decided it was eminently safe.

She concluded now, as they all knelt, according to the old family custom.

“Watch over us through the hours of darkness. Protect us, we beseech Thee, from sin and from harm, and wake us if it be Thy will to meet the new day with purity of heart and refreshment of mind and body.”

For a few seconds no one stirred, as the clock ticked on and a lump of coal fell in the grate. The hearts of the four older people were all back in the room at the farm. They were seeing Daniel's head raised as though seeing visions, and Sarah's sweet grey eyes misted over as she yearned towards heaven in her secret petitions for her children.

Then they all rose. David got his hat, said good-night quickly, and left the house, without meeting Jeannie's eyes. Liza Jane, her lips set tightly together, wound the clock, felt the latches on the windows, and locked the cellar door. Betsy got a glass of water from the sink and started at once for the stairs, her full lips trembling.

When the house at last was quiet, Betsy spoke softly to Liza Jane.

“I don't think Jeannie has ever had a suspicion of—of what we think. She couldn't ever see a fault in David even if we tried to tell her. Of course, Liza Jane, we *might* be mistaken!”

“Never. Why would he go out every night he's been

here for the last fifteen years and stay till all hours? You can't tell me he's talking to any old cronies downtown all that time. And why would Terese just suddenly stop coming to Communion years ago and never give any real reason for it? And her such a faithful churchgoer. Oh, if only it's never brought to light in town! I couldn't stand the shame of it. It would kill me!"

A sob escaped Betsy. "And if only they're not both *lost* for all eternity for their sin . . . !"

But the older girls were wrong about Jeannie. She had carried the secret of David and Terese in her heart longer than their own had even harboured a suspicion. She had known, too, long before they had that David's marriage was a failure. He had spoken of it to her once, and never again referred to it. Nor had she.

"It was a mistake, Jeannie. I might as well tell you. Margaret had always known economic and social stability. She wanted that to continue, so she married me. She's a brilliant woman, but she's absolutely selfish and, I might almost say, sexless. She spends my money, manages the house, and presides at our dinners. Beyond that she gives me—just nothing. As long as she can head committees and manage campaigns, her life is complete. She wants what I can give her and will hang on to that at any cost, but she doesn't want—me. That's the whole story in a nutshell."

"And there's no way out for you, Davy?" Jeannie had asked piteously.

"No decent way. So I'll just thole."

Even in those first disillusioned years, however, David never willingly mentioned Terese. And Terese avoided any meeting with him. This was comparatively simple, as David always sent word ahead of his arrival. "If I can manage it, I'll be out next Saturday to spend a day or so with you," the letter would say. And Jeannie always passed on this information to Terese.

Then one summer day it had happened. David came unannounced. He walked up the sidewalk to the back porch and met Terese face to face. They had not seen each other in years. Terese was in her early forties then, but still a woman any man might have desired. Her slender frame had filled out, but she was still lithe and graceful. Her face had changed little. Her hair was still black. She was wearing a white dress, open at the throat, and atwirl behind her head was a new white parasol she had just bought in Greensburg and brought over to show to Jeannie.

She and David looked at each other for a long second. And they were alone upon the earth.

"Terese!" His voice was almost harsh as he spoke her name.

"David!" she whispered.

And they said nothing more. Terese passed him swiftly and went away along the walk, across the path in the vacant lot, on through the backyard of the Forsythes' house that showed white behind the trees.

David's eyes had followed her; then with an effort he brought himself back to the girls waiting on the porch. He tried to carry it off with a light hand.

"I was really startled for a minute. Haven't seen Terese in so long. She's looking well, isn't she? And how is everybody here?"

But all the evening he had been restless. When nine o'clock came, he took his hat.

"I think I'll take a stroll down street," he remarked. "Leave the back door open for me, will you?"

Jeannie's heart had ached for them both. She could do nothing now for David, but it occurred to her later that she might at least run over to speak a moment with Terese. Mrs. Forsythe had never been the same since Big Bob's death. The shock had aged her frightfully. Her heart was not good, and she had to rest much of the

time. She would be in bed now and asleep, and Terese would be sitting there alone with her thoughts. Jeannie made a quick excuse.

"I believe I'll run over to the Forsythes' and see if Terese might have a duck egg. You know how Davy used to like them."

She was off in a minute through the dark street, picking her way from long practice. There was still at that time the danger of tripping over a sleeping cow that was allowed to seek its own pasture during the night. She crossed the vacant lot at the upper end of the street and slipped through the gate at the foot of the Forsythes' garden. There was no light in the back parlour where Terese usually slept to be near Mrs. Forsythe's first-floor bedroom across the way, so Terese would likely be at the front of the house.

Jeannie had gone softly over the back porch and entered the wide centre hall. There she stopped dead. On the marble-topped table lay a man's hat. It was David's. And from the back parlour came a low murmur of voices. They were not the voices of casual conversation. Jeannie was a woman, and she had been passionately loved——

She turned and fled over the way she had come, her own breath suffocating her. In the vacant lot she had stood, with her hand at her heart, stunned by this thing she had discovered. But to her horror there came to her mind no such violent condemnation as one should have for a case like this. Instead, there rose the thought of David and his cruel disappointments, the barrenness of his home life, and the long faithful, hopeless love of Terese. For Jeannie knew that most of the young farmers of the neighbourhood had at some time or other made overtures to Terese. She had scarcely looked upon them. Her heart knew one great passion and would know no other.

And now, to-night, they were together, experiencing the consummation of the years. David and Terese. It was incredible! It couldn't be, Jeannie thought. She had made a great and ghastly mistake—— But she knew she had not. She must accept the strange fact and live with it, without letting any one else know. If only the threads of right and wrong were not so inextricably twisted! If only she could blame them utterly or be entirely happy for them! But there was no such surety of soul possible for Jeannie. She wrung her hands.

"If James were here," she moaned to herself, "he would somehow know what was right to think about it all."

At last she became conscious of the stars, as she always did sooner or later. She looked steadily up at them. They were very bright, and the summer darkness was like a thin veil between them and the earth. They had looked down upon how many strange pairs of lovers! They would look down upon how many more!

Jeannie watched them until the trembling went out of her limbs. She watched them until the tumult of her heart grew quiet. When she reached home she was almost calm.

The next morning, as they cooked the breakfast, they had heard David singing as he dressed and slamming doors boyishly.

"Why, David appears to be in fine fettle this morning," Betsy had remarked.

When he left next day Jeannie had not known what to say. All at once nothing mattered except her love for him. Her words, however, were not those she intended.

"Come back soon, Davy," she whispered, and then caught her breath.

He had given her a quick hug.

"I will," he said.

After that his visits had become so regular that even the small Constance commented upon their frequency.

Now on this winter night, years later, Jeannie lay in bed, while Liza Jane and Betsy whispered together in the next room. The old fear that some one in town would find out about the relations of David and Terese had long since been quiet within her. No one seemed to suspect. There was only her own heart to cope with. Jeannie turned to watch the moonlight falling athwart the floor. She thought again, deeply, of David's strange dual existence. She thought with a quiver of excitement, which she never could control when the least hope presented itself, that perhaps now this new lawyer would do something to make the coal company buy the farm.

But her last thoughts were, as always, of Constance. She thought of Friday night and the coming party at the McIlvaines'. She wondered if it would really be a dance.



## CHAPTER TWO

THE NEXT WEEK WENT QUICKLY, HAVING WITHIN IT THAT delicate air of tension which comes when minds are fixed on a point beyond the passing hours. Jeannie sewed steadily upon the new dress, adding two extra ruffles to the skirt which she had not originally intended, wondering as she stitched whether by any chance Constance would fall in love with Billy Brown.

She reviewed him mentally. He was a thickly-built young fellow with broad, heavy shoulders and strong arms. He had the early maturity of a farm youth coupled with the assurance that comes of firm financial standing in a small poverty-ridden community. He had gray eyes a little too closely set and a pleasant enough smile. Billy, like those of the blood royal, would feel, Jeannie supposed, that he was conferring the favour when he singled out any girl for his attentions. And, while he had no mind to match Connie's, there was his masterful virility to reckon with. Sometimes a girl was caught by that!

But beneath her fear Jeannie's maternal heart felt a certain pride. The McIlvaines' parties were events in the social calendar of the year. And to this one Connie would go with the catch of the countryside as her escort! She had mentioned something of all this to David when they went for a walk on Sunday afternoon before he left, and he had chuckled to himself.

"Weel pleased to see her bairn's respectit like the lave," he had quoted.

And Jeannie laughed with him as she admitted the truth of it.

As for Constance herself, when she drove to and from

the country schoolhouse, with time to think of Friday night, she felt a warm palpitating excitement. She had, as she quite well knew, occupied a rather curious position in the social life of the young people. As far as the matter of family went, no one could claim a more definite place of distinction than she. In looks, too, she knew that she could measure up to the rest of her friends. And, even though it took much pinching and recourse to the dye-pot, her clothes were as good as those of the average girl of New Salem. But, having granted all this, Connie knew that there was still something lacking. She was not really one of her crowd.

Not that she had ever failed to be invited to a general party. She was duly invited everywhere except to the dances. But if the party was in the country, as it frequently was, there was always the nerve-racking uncertainty of how she was to get there. Usually, on the very evening before the affair, one of the more nondescript young swains of the town who had no steady girl would ring the front-door bell, and, upon Connie's appearance, would stand first on one foot and then the other while the matter of the weather was dispensed with; then with a final embarrassed cough he would resort to the stereotyped question which Connie hated with a mild desperation.

"Have you any way to go to the party to-morrow night?"

The very form of the request was an implied admission of her failure at popularity. Each time she heard it, Connie felt she would have given all she had to be able to say brightly, "Oh, yes, thank you, I've already made my plans."

But she never could. And bitterest of all was the suspicion that the awkward and lack-lustre youth before her had been sent there by some of her friends who, serene and assured with their own "steady company,"

could afford to be patronisingly thoughtful about Connie's beauless estate!

Huldah Henderson, Billy Brown's cousin, was in many ways Connie's closest friend. She was a big blooming girl with an exuberance of good spirits and easy kindness, a ready tongue that raced on about nothing, and feet that knew every figure of the country square dances before she was ten years old. She often talked earnestly to Connie about the social situation.

"If you only *danced*, Connie, that would make a lot of difference. Take Jim Wilson, now, or Don Bell. I'll bet you either of them would keep company with you if you would dance. And it's the best fun there is, Connie."

Constance always looked grave at this, her dark eyes burning with the light of martyrs.

"You know how much I want to dance, Huldah, but I'll *never* do it while the church thinks it's a sin. How could I when I'm the president of the Christian Endeavour and teach a Sunday School class and sing in the choir? How *could* I, Huldah?"

Huldah always desisted at last, knowing it was useless, and, since her family took their religion more lightly than did the McDowells, kept blithely to her usual course.

But the attitude of the church against dancing had been gaining in intensity of late. Old Dr. Rayburn, the minister, had been growing more and more outspoken in his prayers at Sunday morning service.

". . . And may those of our young people whose hearts are carried away by sinful pleasures be brought to full knowledge and repentance before it is too late. And may strength be given to the leaders of this church to stamp out the worldliness and ungodliness of questionable amusements. . . ."

This, and the news from the Session meetings which seeped out through the wives of the Elders, had made an

undercurrent of gossip in the town. *Would* the church really take action? There were many who said it would not. For amongst the dancing crowd were some of the most substantial families of the community. How could the church afford to estrange them by an open break?

But there were others who pursed their lips and said it was high time something was done, what with that big barn dance over by Blairsville last fall that *even the sons of one or two of the Elders* had attended, and all these parties round the country every week or so that ended up in dances. What were the young people coming to? The church ought not to condone such goings-on. It ought to *do* something. Liza Jane and Betsy belonged to this latter faction, while Jeannie for the most part remained silent on the matter.

Connie thought pointedly of the whole situation as she waited for Friday to come. Even though she could take no part in it, it would be interesting to see a big dance—as this affair at the McIlvaines' was likely to turn out to be, before the evening was over.

But, apart from the vexed problem of the dancing, Connie was happier than she could ever remember being. For once she had all the pleasure of sure anticipation. She did not need to say apologetically to the folks at home, "If I *should* go to the party, I will wear chus and so." She did not need to listen nervously as the evenings passed for a step on the front porch and a ring of the bell! For once she was secure—and with a wide margin at that. She was going with *Billy Brown*! She could already sense the aura of importance that would surround her when the other girls knew of it. And she felt no fear of not pleasing Billy himself. For there was one thing in connection with his visit to the schoolhouse that Connie had not told even to her mother. That was the look of real admiration in his eyes as he stood on

the step of the small wooden porch platform looking up at her. He had even fumbled with his hat, Billy the assured, and had said as he left, "I've been thinking for some time now—that is, I've wondered if you—I've been planning to ask you to go out with me." He looked embarrassed while Connie was strangely calm. She was tasting her first knowledge of a maiden's power and finding it surprisingly sweet.

Connie had wished for snow, and, as though the elements themselves were determined to be propitious, the ground was white on Friday morning. All through the day, as she heard her classes and poked the fire in the big pot-bellied stove in the centre of the schoolroom, she could see the steady fall of the flakes outside. When she reached home at last at five o'clock the driveway was an unbroken drift, and the whole street was buried in white. The air, heady with ozone, held a great hush.

Connie felt her heart quicken and her limbs tremble. It was to her excited fancy as though the whole earth listened breathlessly for the sound of Billy Brown's sleigh bells.

They were all waiting eagerly for her in the kitchen. Jeannie had finished the last pressing of the dress, and it lay now carefully draped over one of the parlour chairs. Connie ran to see it at once, kissing Jeannie in the seclusion of the room. Then Liza Jane hurried them to the supper table. Her hands shook a little as she served the plates, and Betsy was openly nervous.

"It'll be the sleigh to-night, I doubt—that is, if the roads are broken enough. My, I hope he won't drive one of those fool colts he's always riding!"

"Oh, fiddlesticks!" said Jeannie calmly. "Billy knows what he's doing when it comes to horses."

"And mind you're to wrap up well, Connie," Liza Jane said with the sharpness her voice always took on in times of emotional stress. "I've got your clean underthings



all here by the stove so you won't get a chill changing. And you'd better not dilly too long over your supper, either. You don't want to keep him waiting."

"And do be careful of your behaviour, Constance," Betsy began in a voice not quite steady. "You know being out late at night alone with a young man like Billy Brown means that you must be—not that I think he's *wild*, but you know a young man with money sometimes is——"

"Why, of course their behaviour will be exemplary. What on earth would you expect?" Jeannie broke in quickly. "Now when you're all through with your supper I'll go up with Connie and help her dress, for there may be another hook and eye needed. Then she'll come down and surprise you!"

Liza Jane gathered up the garments she had warming at the oven door. Underneath was a red flannel petticoat.

"Oh, Aunt Liza, I don't want *that*!" Connie exclaimed. "I've got my little knitted one."

"You'll just wear *this*, young lady!. What signifies those futey little rags on a night like this! It's a good hour and a half's drive, mind you, to the McIlvaines'. Now, Jeannie, you see she wears this."

Once in the security of her own room, Connie picked up the red petticoat with loathing and appealed to her mother.

"I don't want this thing. I *hate* red flannel."

Jeannie twisted a curl.

"So do I. It makes me think of bull fights. If Liza Jane didn't take such violent stands about things——" Suddenly Jeannie giggled. "I'll settle it!" she said, "and peaceably, too."

She caught up the offending garment and slipped into it herself.

"There!" she said. "Now, when I tell her it's being worn, my conscience will be clear."



When she returned to the kitchen Liza Jane was bristling for further argument.

"What about the flannel petticoat?" she demanded.

"It's on," Jeannie replied laconically.

Liza Jane sniffed.

"Well, that's something like! The way the young girls go round now half naked is just tempting Providence. Look at Huldah Henderson! Didn't she admit she hadn't a stitch on her legs but fleece-lined drawers and cotton stockings and *one* petticoat! If they don't all get consumption it won't be their fault. Well—how does she look?"

But Jeannie was saved from answering by Connie's feet on the stairs. The girl stood in the doorway, her dark hair loosed from its usual braids and piled softly upon her head, the rose-coloured dress sheathing her slenderness like a flame, her face alight with the strange new excitement of knowing herself desirable.

The three women drew back a little. Betsy sat down abruptly on a chair. There was something striking in Connie's loveliness, "terrible as an army with banners." In Jeannie's heart was running a mingled refrain of pride and fear: "It would take a strong man to resist her."

And then, before their comments were over, a sound smote the quiet street; a clear sharp shower of metallic music. The peculiar quick ring of the Browns' sleigh bells!

Jeannie took command at once.

"Light the lamp in the parlour. Quick, Connie, so he can see the hitching post. And bring him in a minute to get warmed. I'll lay out your wraps!"

The swinging jingle of the bells stopped. There was a heavy stamping on the front porch, and then in a moment Billy Brown was ushered through the parlour into the cozier warmth of the sitting-room. He wore a great topcoat and held a fur cap and heavy gloves in his hand. His face was ruddy from the cold and his eyes bright. A

handsome young fellow in a heavy way, filling the room with his vigorous masculinity.

By the time he had warmed his hands and reported upon the health of the family and the condition of the roads, Connie came in wearing her coat, and a white ice-wool fascinator of Jeannie's tied loosely about her head. They all saw then the expression in young Billy's eyes as he looked at her.

"Well, I suppose we'd better be getting along," he said.

"Is your horse quiet?" Betsy inquired nervously.

"Why, I'm driving a pair to-night. They feel the cold some, but I can manage them all right."

"And don't be *too* late getting home, Connie," Liza Jane adjured in a stage whisper.

Jeannie at once shepherded the young people towards the front door.

"Good-bye, Connie! Good-bye, Billy! Have a good time!"

She stood, holding the hall lamp in her hand while Billy helped Connie carefully down the steps. Then suddenly he picked her up as if she had been a feather.

"Snow's pretty deep here," he said casually, and deposited her in the sleigh.

He wrapped the fur robe about her, loosed the horses, then sprang into his seat and grasped the lines as the span leaped forward. He pulled them quickly to their haunches, called a sharp command—and they were off! *Jingle, jangle, jingle, jangle, jingle*, came back through the crisp air, first with deafening sweetness, then as muted echoes.

Jeannie closed the door, shivering as she set down the hall lamp, and repaired with the older girls (who had been peeping under the edge of the parlour shades) to the sitting-room to talk it over. She felt a familiar weight upon her heart—a sorrow that time could never appease. She was seeing again James's face as he bent above her at

singing school. "Remember, you're riding home on the seat with me!"

After the first thrill of the start, the sudden feel of Billy's strong arms lifting her, and the plunge of the lively horses, Connie sank back into the sleigh in a warm quiver of happiness. The snow had stopped falling, and the stars could be seen dimly through the misty sky. They soon left New Salem far behind and turned into the country, where the white stretched unbroken for miles except for the pin-prick of a light here and there among the hills. The horses needed firm handling, and Connie could feel the tension and power of the muscles beside her that mastered them. Conversation was spasmodic. It seemed enough to sit snuggled in the great fur robe and be borne swiftly and lightly over the snow to the accompaniment of the bells. Apparently Billy thought so, too, for his remarks were brief. Sometimes, though, as he spoke he turned his eyes from the track ahead and looked full at Connie. She knew then that it was not necessary to exert herself to please him, and she exulted in the thought.

When they reached the lane that led to the big McIlvaine farmhouse, Connie did voice her one fear:

"You know, Billy, I don't dance."

"Oh, there's always other games," he returned lightly.

The big square between the house and barn had been well bisected by paths. The drifts around the fence where the horses must be tied, had been shovelled out too, by the husky McIlvaine boys. A few big oil lanterns, fastened here and there to the posts, aided the pale light from the snow. Billy drove past the house and stopped beside one of the paths.

"Would you mind getting out here till I tie up the team?" he asked. "These horses are a handful. I'll only be a minute."

Connie stepped out easily from the low sleigh, a

thunderous new beating in her heart. This, too, had significance. The more casually matched couples always entered the party houses separately. The girl got out at the steps and went on in while her escort attended leisurely to the disposition of his horse, perhaps loitering about until two or three other of the less deeply attached swains joined him at the barn, from whence they finally made their way to the house.

But the couples that were definitely marked as "cases" always came in together. Connie had watched them before with a queer envy. It was as though by doing so the young man announced to all present: "This is my girl! Mine to bring, mine through the evening, mine to take home again!"

And now Billy had asked her to wait. He meant to go in with her!

The big square house was all alight. By the number of sleighs and sleds hitched in the barnyard the party was a large one, with most of the guests already here. Connie, helped along the path and up the wide, high steps to the front porch by Billy's strong arm, stamped the snow delicately from her arctic boots and shivered not from cold but from an overpowering excitement.

The big door was swung open, and a burst of chatter and laughter came with it. The house was already full of young people. For one breathless second, the noise stopped as all in view of the hall looked at the pair who entered. Connie could sense the whispers that passed around:

"Connie Richards and Billy Brown!"

"Billy Brown's brought Connie Richards!"

Mrs. McIlvaine in her best silk, spotted from many comfortable dinners, greeted them warmly. She was a short stout woman with ample breasts upon which nine children had been nursed. But the nuances of house-keeping did not worry Mrs. McIlvaine. Her table was laden with hearty food three times a day, her children

grew up a healthy, happy brood, and with her jolly husband she was said to enjoy a dance as much as anybody. The very fact that there was no carpet whatever on the kitchen floor, and very little furniture in the big parlour, only made the house a more suitable one for parties! And why bother to clean up much beforehand with all that crowd coming! Just bake plenty of cakes and pies, and don't fret yourself about a little dust! That was the advice she gave her daughters, and the results seemed to justify it.

"Girls to the room on the right! Young men to the left," she was saying now as she waved them cheerfully towards the stairs.

Connie entered the big bedroom and found herself alone in it. They *were* the last to arrive, then. She found an unoccupied spot along the wall for her arctics, laid her coat and fascinator on top of the heavy dark miscellany on the bed, and then smoothed her hair by the light of the bureau lamp. Her eyes sparkled back at her from the mirror. She knew without vanity, but with a great feeling of relief, that she was more than merely pretty.

On the landing, Billy was waiting. His sharp blue eyes softened queerly as he looked at her.

"Mind," he said under his breath as they went down the stairs, "Mind, I'm your first partner for all the games and of course for supper!"

"Of course," Connie replied. "That will be fine."

Jack McIlvaine, in the parlour doorway, was already calling out directions, and the forty-odd young people were moving about, finding partners.

"Come on now! 'Pig in the parlour' out in the sittin'-room, and 'Skip Come a Loo' in here! Just to get your blood warmed up!"

"Let's go to the parlour," Billy said.

There was shouting and laughter and joking there as they took their places.



"Hallo, Connie!" "Hey, Bill!"

The greetings were casual, but Connie felt the surprised question in their eyes. Huldah Henderson left her partner and rushed to her friend's side. She whispered under cover of the noise:

"Connie, if you aren't the sly one! How long has this been going on? You and Billy! What does it mean?"

"Oh, nothing," Connie laughed, flushing.

Billy was already taking her hand to draw up the circle. Some one started the tune.

*"My wife's gone, and I'll go, too,  
Skip come a loo, my darling!"*

Each time it was Billy's turn to swing, he came un-failingly back to Connie. She was thistledown in his arms. She was not shy any more, as she had been as an odd girl. She smiled up into his eyes provocatively, and he pressed her closer as he swung. She was selected by the other boys, too, more and more often. Her flashing rose-ruffled dress became the centre of the circle. She, *Connie*, was being popular. More so even than Huldah! She felt it in her veins like a joyous, potent wine!

*"Little red wagon painted blue!  
Flies in the sugar bowl, shoo, shoo, shoo!"*

The inanities of the words were lost in the laughing voices that sang and the shuffle and tap of the merry feet.

"Hey there, Bill, don't swing her all night! There's more of us in this game!" one of the boys called.

"Mind your own business, will you?" Billy responded boisterously, as the fun went on.

It was when every one stopped at last to rest that a sound came from the kitchen that went through Connie's heart like a pain. It was a thin, squeaky, rollicky tune



played on a fiddle. At once there was an excited clamour.

"It's Lute Gardner! Sure it is. Can't you tell by the way he plays? Say, there'll be fun all right to-night if Lute's going to call figures!"

Connie could feel the new animation that at once possessed the crowd. The game they had just played had been a mere prelude. The real pleasure of the evening was to begin now. Alas, so soon! Her little triumph was over. Once again she would be on the outside.

The crowd were moving eagerly out of the parlour, through the sitting-room, on to the big bare kitchen.

Connie touched Billy's arm. Her eyes were more piteous than she knew.

"I'm sorry, Billy. You see I'm sort of out of it now. I can't dance. But you go right ahead."

Billy looked embarrassed.

"That's all right," he said. "We'll sit down and watch the first set."

The kitchen was an unusually large room, and nothing had been left in it but a row of straight chairs along the wall. The cook-stove and sink always stood in a pantry-like lean-to at the side. There was light from the blazing coal fire in the grate and from lamps with bright tin reflectors on opposite walls.

In one corner stood Lute Gardner, six feet two in his socks, lean, wrinkled, tobacco-stained, and smiling; his fiddle under his chin, his blue eyes roving appraisingly over the crowd. Lute was known all over the countryside as a character. He lived alone in a small cottage in the woods on the Henderson farm, did days' work for the farmers except when he was on an occasional spree, and between times was in demand at all the dances.

For Lute not only could play tunes on his fiddle that would make "even a pig keep time," as the saying went, but in his wanderings over five counties he had picked up the widest assortment of figures of any one in that end of

the state. His fame had spread so widely that letters often came to him addressed: "Mr. Lute Gardner, Caller of Dance Figures, Vicinity of New Salem, Pa."

These letters containing pressing inquiries as to whether he could arrange to play for a dance "in Longman's barn down by Poke Run on July 6th," or "at Tom Harris' farmhouse out beyond Livermore on November 8th," were never answered. But to the surprise and delight of the various hosts, Lute always turned up at the appointed place, no matter how far distant, his fiddle under his arm, taciturn, smiling, eyeing the crowd as he took over his place as master of ceremonies.

There was one tradition in regard to Lute which was far spread. He had never married; so far as any one knew, since he had lived around about New Salem women had had no place in his life. But on certain occasions when he was apparently deeply moved by a certain girl's beauty, he would follow her with his eyes—so the story went—and then begin to play hauntingly on his fiddle "The Girl I Left Behind Me," later calling the figures that went with the tune.

Nobody knew exactly what connection this had with Lute Gardner's life, but since he had fought in the Spanish-American War, it was generally supposed that his girl had died while he was in Cuba. All the women were a little soft-hearted over Lute, and every girl of the dancing crowd who heard the story looked some time in her mirror wondering if Lute would ever play to her.

The sets were forming now on the floor. Connie watched breathlessly, the fact that what she was about to witness was under the ban of the church serving only to make her curiosity the more intense.

Lute Gardner drew a long note on his fiddle. Every one grew quiet. Then the music began, a tune the like of which Connie had never heard; a tune to set her own muscles twitching and her feet restlessly keeping time

with the stamping and tapping of the other feet upon the floor.

*"Balance eight and all eight swing.  
A left allemande and a right-hand grand.  
Meet your partner and promenade eight  
Till you come back straight!"*

In a kind of charmed amazement, Connie watched the laughing, swinging couples as they followed the figures that Lute called out clearly above the music.

*"Forward up centre and swing.  
Through head couple, lady to  
right and gent to left. . . ."*

Connie clutched Billy's sleeve.

"Why," she whispered, "why, this surely isn't any more harm than playing 'Peal the willow' or 'Pig in the Parlour'!"

"Sure it ain't," Billy echoed eagerly. "Sure, it's just the same. Come on, try the next set with me. I'll help you."

Lute was on the Chorus Call. The dancers were flushed and in full accord with his music. The very spirit of rollicking rhythm was in the air. Some of those sitting along the walls were clapping softly on the accented words.

*"Stand up straight and simmer down eight!  
"Swing on the corner like swingin' on a gate,  
And then your own, if you ain't too late!  
A left allemande and a right-hand grand,  
Meet your partner and promenade there,  
You know where and I don't care!"*

It ended in a burst of laughter and applause. Over the

heads of the dancers, Connie could see the eyes of Lute Gardner looking at her.

"Come on, Connie. Let's get in this next set. You can see for yourself that it's just almost the same as the games you've always played."

"Well, why should people think it's such a sin then?" Connie whispered dazedly.

"Search me!" Billy answered. "Come on, Connie. Just once to please me! Honest, if you want to stop after one set I won't ask you again!"

There was a sweeping movement now of new partners getting together, a restlessness for the music to start again, and the stimulus of the knowledge that soon they would be lost once more in the rhythmic whirl and swing of the figures. The bare room with its wide board floor and flickering oil lamps was filled with more than the echoes of dancing feet. There was the electric presence of released spirits abroad in it. Cramped young hearts expanded with a passing joy; senses were aquiver with the warmth and the poetry of natural motion.

Connie's sensitive perceptions were keenly aware of all this. Everything was sweeping her on to the point where she would be a part of all she was seeing and feeling. That first half-hour, in which she had been a radiant centre of the fun, bore its weight upon her. So did Billy's voice, eagerly pleading! (The miracle of Billy Brown pleading with *her* for anything!)

"Say, ain't you gettin' into this set?" Jack McIlvaine called to them.

"Sure," Billy answered quickly. With one movement of his arm he had Connie on her feet. He was taking her, still half against her will, to the centre of the floor.

"Billy, I can't. Really you know I oughtn't——"

But his arm was holding her closely to him.

"Sure you can. I'll help you. You'll like it," he whispered. Then with his quick, overpowering way he

called to the others to fill up the set. They were ready. Lute Gardner drew his long quivering note. Then the inescapable rollicking tune!

*"First couple out to the right!  
Around that couple and take a little peek.  
Back to the centre and swing your sweet.  
Around that couple and peek once more.  
Back in the centre and circle up four!  
Right and left through and lead right on. . . ."*

As though she had done it all her life, Connie swung to the music. She had been made for this! While some of the other girls moved stiffly or heavily to Lute's commands, Connie bent and swayed with the grace of a young sapling in the wind. She was alive from her dark hair to her quick twinkling feet. Every twinge of conscience had left her. She forgot everything but the sheer joy of the exhilarating rhythm.

*"Home you are with a balance all!  
Swing around eight and swing around all.  
Go up the river and 'cross the lake.  
A left allemande and a grand chain eight!  
Hurry up, gents, and don't go slow  
And meet your honey with a promeno!"*

It was over. Connie was trembling. She *had danced!* And worst of all, she wasn't sorry. How could any one regret such bliss!

"Say, Connie, you know you're *great!*" Billy was saying under his breath. "Give me the next one, will you?"

And then something strange happened. When the new sets had taken the floor, Lute Gardner drew his bow and very slowly began to play. Everybody quieted, and paused, surprised.

Lute with his weathered, inscrutable face looked back at them. He played "The Girl I Left Behind Me," drawing from the tune a thin, melancholy sweetness. And then everybody noticed that his eyes came to rest on one person. It was Constance Richards.

When he stopped, there was whispering aplenty. Huldah called across in a stage whisper, "Well, Connie, you've made a hit to-night, all right!"

Connie could hear other low comments.

"They say it's been a couple of years now since Lute's played that!"

"Sure! Connie Richards! He was lookin' straight at her. Some compliment from Lute, huh?"

Then in a moment the dance began with Lute's natively melodious tenor voice in a kind of singsong:

*"The head couple lead out to the right  
And balance there so kindly;  
Then pass right through and balance, too,  
And swing that girl behind you!  
Then take that girl, that pretty little girl,  
The girl that was behind you;  
And pass right through and balance, too,  
And swing that girl behind you!"*

As though to make the object of his admiration the more certain in the eyes of the rest, Lute varied his line occasionally to

*"Then take that girl in the red ruffled dress . . ."*

There was no doubt! Connie had received the rustic accolade. Every one smiled at her or called teasing compliments now as the steps continued. With her cheeks flaming and her eyes very bright. Connie held her head high and swung through the figures. She could detect a quickened interest in the faces of all the young



men. But Billy's behaviour was significant to the point of embarrassment. He stamped and clapped boisterously, flinging his broad shoulders in pure arrogance. It was almost as though he were shouting above the music: "I don't know how to pick a girl, don't I? Well, what do you all think of this!"

He swung the other girls as though they were so many wooden pins and then, with an eagerness he took no pains to conceal, sprang towards Connie again and looked possessively at her as he held her in his arms!

Something deep within Connie was conscious of a heavy boorishness in Billy's demeanour, something almost uncouth from which she would shrink if there were not the music and the rhythm to sweep her on. But she crushed down the thought. She was the queen of the evening, and Billy Brown was apparently losing his head over her! Would she be insane enough to question any trifling defects in her newly organised Paradise?

But when Lute at last laid his fiddle carefully on the kitchen mantelpiece and all settled in circles throughout the various rooms for supper, Connie was acutely aware of something she had often been struck with before at parties. There was plenty of nervous giggling on the part of the girls in her circle, and a great deal of heavy teasing and loud guffaws on the part of the boys, but there was no hint of intelligent conversation. And yet they were none of them children. Billy was twenty-five. Most of the boys had voted for several years. The girls were all old enough to have *something* to say.

She turned suddenly towards Billy:

"Aren't you glad Teddy Roosevelt's safely elected? I think he's wonderful, don't you?"

"Oh, he's all right, I guess. . . . Hey, Don! Havin' trouble with your pie? Why don't you put your foot on it?"

Uproarious laughter followed this remark.

Jack McIlvaine was busy clutching paper napkins from the girls near him. Don Bell in a loud voice was telling how he had almost upset his sleigh and then righted it again to scare Mary Porter, who had come with him. Jim Wilson had tied the ends of Bella McKain's sash to her chair! It was all right, Connie reassured herself. What did she expect? Have them all sit around and talk politics or quote Browning? She was foolish, that was all.

"I want to speak to Huldah about Institute Week," she told Billy brightly. "I wonder where she's sitting?"

"I'll see," Billy said with alacrity. Then, leaning near her, he whispered: "What do you say we cut out and leave before long? It's one o'clock now, pretty near."

"I think we should, really," Constance agreed.

They found Huldah in the next room, and at once she and Connie were deep in their plans for the high point of the teachers' year—the traditional "Institute" which was held in Greensburg the week before Christmas for all those employed in the schools of the county. It was a great event, and the girls' faces showed with what interest they looked forward to it. They would board at the same place as last year. The price, however, Huldah said, had been raised.

"My, I wish we could stay at the hotel!" she went on wistfully. "All the biggest swells do."

"But we simply *couldn't* afford that. At least *I* couldn't," Connie said. "It's bad enough to have the regular boarding price raised."

"Listen, Connie. There's one thing I'm set on this year. I'm going one night to the hotel for dinner, I don't care *what* it costs! Let's dress up and eat like ladies for once. What do you think?"

"Oh, I'd love it," Connie breathed. "I'll talk it over with Mother. It hardly seems right to spend the extra money, but I'll see."

There was a little stir of some early departures near the

door, and Connie went to get her wraps. In a few minutes she and Billy had made their adieux and were out again in the sleigh. Billy handled his horses expertly, and at last, when they had settled down to an even trot, he gathered the lines firmly in his right hand and allowed his left arm to steal slowly along the back of the sleigh. Connie sat tense, feeling it, and not knowing what to do about it.

According to her code, spooning was indelicate and unladylike. But she knew that all the girls who had steady beaux permitted it. It went, indeed, with that most desirable attribute of *belonging* socially, which had never until now been hers. She sat very still, her heart beating uncomfortably, feeling Billy's arm creep on, touching her shoulders at last, encircling her. Neither of them spoke. Billy leaned closer. His head was near her own.

"Say, I sit and look at you every Sunday in the choir," he said thickly.

"You should be listening to the sermon," Connie said with a nervous attempt at laughter.

Billy, laughed also, too loudly.

"You're funny—the way you say things. . . . I don't know. You ain't like the other girls round here. Mebbe it's because you've been to college and all."

"Why, I'm not a bit unique," Connie said.

"There—that's what I mean. Talking that way. But it suits *me* all right!"

He drew his arm closer.

"What about a kiss, Connie?"

"Oh, Billy, I'd rather not!"

"All right," Billy returned magnanimously. "I hardly s'posed you'd let me the first time we're out together. Say, will you go with me to a chicken and waffle supper over at Blairsville next Wednesday night?"

"I'm awfully sorry, Billy. I couldn't. It's prayer-meeting night, and I play the organ. You see how it is, don't you?"

All at once she was frightened at thought of losing something. But Billy was once again generous.

"Sure, *I* understand. I know you're great on church work and all. But we'll be getting up another party soon. And say, if any one else asks you, tell them you're already spoke for, will you?"

"Yes," Connie whispered in amazed delight.

Billy held the horses back. She knew now why he had been ready to leave at one o'clock. He wanted the long, slow ride home in the warmth of the sleigh, his arm around her, his head against hers.

After all the years of being an odd girl, suddenly to have *Billy Brown in love with her!* For she knew that he was. Though all untutored, her woman's heritage included this immediate and infallible perception. And knowing it, all in the moment, she found the world a different place.

Connie suddenly relaxed her tension. She yielded herself ever so slightly to the encircling arm. She refused to think of any unfavourable impressions the evening had held. She brought up from her heart, happily, a treasure for her knight.

"Billy," she said softly, "don't you love the snow? The hush and the whiteness of a night like this? There's a mystery about it, I always feel. And then the little flakes themselves: each one so delicate—with a lovely design all its own. . . . Don't you think it's wonderful?"

But Billy gave a rather embarrassed laugh.

"Gosh! I don't care much about snow one way or 'nother. It's good for the wheat, though."

And then there was silence. And Connie, as the white miles passed, knew why in spite of all her brave pretence. Billy said nothing because he had nothing to say. And she—would she ever really have anything to say—to *him?*

Another mood crept slowly upon her like a hoar frost

from out the night. Up to now Billy's interest in her seemed to have justified everything, even the dancing. But now for the first time, her conscience, put to sleep by the glamorous success of the evening, stirred uncomfortably. Anxious thoughts crowded in upon her from the great silence all around, and even the brown sleigh bells jangled on a minor key.

When they got home, she could hear herself telling Billy brightly that she had had a fine time. No, she wasn't a bit cold. Yes, it had been a lot of fun. She thanked him again, called a final good-night, and softly opened the front door.

At once a voice came sharply from above.

"That you, Connie?"

"Yes, Aunt Liza."

"Well, it's about time. Do you know it's going on to *three* o'clock!"

"Is it? Well, I'm here now."

Betsy, clad in a voluminous flannelette nightgown, appeared at the upper hall banister.

"Was—did—was everything all right, Connie?" she inquired tremulously.

"Yes, I had a fine time. I'll tell you all about it in the morning."

"He wasn't—I mean he didn't try to take—was Billy nice and gentlemanly?"

"My goodness, yes! Now get back to bed, Aunt Betsy. You'll take cold."

Betsy swayed back to her room, her cheeks still wet with the easy tears of fear which her riotous imagination had conjured up.

Connie stopped by her mother's doorway, and Jeannie cleared her throat softly as a signal. The girl entered, closing the door carefully behind her.

"Mother!"

"Connie!" Jeannie's voice held that quality of youthful



delight which made it sound in the darkness as though it were another young girl speaking. "If this hasn't been a night of happenings! What *do* you suppose we heard from your Uncle David? Terese was down street, so she brought the mail up to us after you had gone. And David writes that this young lawyer he brought out—Mr. Harrington, his name is—thinks it's worth going to court about the coal! He thinks he has a case for us! Connie, I'm a terrible one to build air castles, but I *am* excited! I've always felt in spite of everything that the coal would sell!"

As she exclaimed properly in reply to the news, Connie could feel the sparkle and animation of her mother's eyes although she could not see them. Jeannie was laughing at herself now a bit sheepishly.

"But I ought to have asked you first about the party! It seemed the biggest thing on the horizon when you left! How did you get along?"

"Oh, just fine. Really, I had a wonderful time; and, Mother, I don't think I ever had as becoming a dress."

"Well, I'm glad! Did they dance?"

"Yes." Something caught hard in Connie's throat. "But I think I'd better wait and give you all the details to-morrow. It is pretty late."

"Of course," Jeannie agreed quickly. "We'll talk over everything in the morning. Good-night, dear."

Connie went into her own small room and lighted the lamp. The news of the coal situation had made little impression upon her. There had been so many false hopes before. Her own immediate problems loomed large enough now to obscure it entirely.

She took off the rose ruffled dress and hung it tenderly in the closet. She braided her hair, slipped finally into her long-sleeved, high-necked nightgown, and knelt beside the bed to say her prayers. Down below, with its familiar measured resonance, the clock struck three.



Nothing could more thoroughly have brought her back to her accustomed habits of thought than the sound of the sitting-room clock. In its tone was the dignity and the rectitude of two generations. Everything she had ever been taught by precept or example of orderly, righteous living was somehow linked up with this solemn articulate voice of the years.

Connie buried her face in her hands, the reaction from the strange, exciting evening now full upon her. She, Constance Richards, a religious leader amongst the young people, the *daughter of a minister*, had brazenly defied the authority of the church that night by dancing! She, who had thought herself so strong, had fallen as easy a prey to temptation as the weakest worldling!

It would all have been bad enough without Lute Gardner's singling her out for his rare compliment. But now with the colourful episode added, the whole story would be broadcast over the countryside by to-morrow!

What would Dr. Rayburn think, and the Session? Oh, what would *everybody* think? But, more imminently pressing, how could she tell her mother in the morning? As to the aunts!

Even in her distress of mind Connie did not entirely confuse the issue. She still felt that her guilt was not so much in the dancing itself as in the direct violation of the ruling of the church. But that was grave enough, almost terrifying indeed, to her sensitive soul.

She prayed earnestly, her cheeks wet with tears, that somehow she might be released from the burden and the consequences of the evening's wrongdoing; and then slowly crawled into bed.

On the small spool-legged table beside the lamp, lay her Bible, from which she read a chapter each night. Ordinarily at an hour such as this after a party, she omitted the rite. But to-night she felt she should make every possible atonement. She huddled the bed covers

about her shoulders, and picked up the little volume. She was reading in course, and the dark ribbon bookmark now lay in Ecclesiastes at the third chapter. Her eyes, heavy from her tears and ready for sleep, could hardly see the small print.

"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven."

She was scarcely conscious of the words, but duty was duty. Connie read slowly on.

". . . A time to weep, and a time to laugh."

Then before her astonished gaze another line flamed suddenly clear:

"A time to mourn, *and a time to dance!*"

Connie shut the book suddenly as though it had burned her fingers, blew out the lamp, and settled into bed, her slender body shivering between the cold sheets.

"A time to dance! A time to dance!" The words rang in her head. They sounded like the perfect extenuation of what she had done that night! But the comfort was, after all, small. Dr. Rayburn would soon explain this line away, she knew. It could not save her from the humiliating throes of the confession that she knew must come.

But, in addition to all the worrisome problem of the dancing, another weight lay upon Connie's heart—a wistful burden of bewilderment. Only a day ago, the thought of having Billy Brown for a steady beau had seemed to her the very peak of romance! Now, by this one evening's revelation she knew deeply that, if she wished, she could some day be Billy's *wife*. And the idea was intolerable to her. Her heart ached over the incomprehensible riddle of it. Why had the golden fruit turned to ashes when it was within her grasp?

### CHAPTER III

THE MONTH OF DECEMBER, 1904, WAS SIGNIFICANT ENOUGH in national and world events to be woven richly into the texture of the year about to close. The *New York Tribune*, which still came to the McDowell girls, thanks to David's arrangement, carried on its front page maps of the famous 203 Metre Hill, key to the western forts of Port Arthur for the possession of which the Russian and Japanese forces were fiercely contending.

It recorded the great Republican Jubilee dinner given at the Waldorf-Astoria to celebrate the election of Theodore Roosevelt by the unprecedented majority of more than two million votes!

It contained the information that Earl Grey was the New Governor-General of Canada ; that President Diaz had taken office in Mexico for the seventh time; that "the Democratic party in the United States stands without a leader, is utterly bankrupt in reputation and has no unity of conviction, sentiment or purpose"; and that ladies' stylish suits having flyfront jackets thirty-three inches long, satin-lined throughout, and eleven-gore flare-plaited skirts, could be bought at Wanamaker's store for \$13.50!

Jeannie, scanning the pages carefully, came across other items which interested her and took her mind off her own worries.

There was the record that the Rev. Charles Wagner, author of *The Simple Life*, had sailed for France surrounded by a large company bidding him farewell; that the Rev. Dr. R. S. MacArthur of New York had declared in a sermon that Atheism was preferable to the creed of Infant Damnation, and that "living thinkers

cannot be tethered to the gravestones of dead theologians"; that the St. Louis World's Fair had closed; that Congress had opened in Washington; that Dr. Lyman Abbott had addressed the students at Harvard College and had been sharply criticised by the conservative religious party as *unsound*; and once again Wanamaker's triumphed with an advertisement for "these stirring groups of Women's Ribbed Merino underwear in natural colour or lavender tinted; vests with high neck and long sleeves; drawers to match in ankle length. Popular weight for winter wear."

Jeannie read these items aloud as they all sat by the fire of an evening in the sitting-room. But she was aware that, while appropriate comment followed, the thoughts of her hearers were elsewhere, as indeed were her own. The truth was that, while battles rages on the opposite side of the world and political history was being made in Washington, the little town of New Salem had a more important topic of its own to discuss. There were currents and cross currents, bitterness and uneasiness and pharisaical complacency, all abroad. For the minister and Session of the Presbyterian Church were finally taking action in regard to the dancing.

On the morning after the big McIlvaine party, when Jeannie had learned the whole story of Connie's defection, she had cautioned the girl not to tell Liza Jane and Betsy just yet, then had put on her hat and jacket and left the house. Connie correctly suspected her mother's destination. For Jeannie went up the street, across the vacant lot, past the Forsythes', and on to the parsonage, set well back amongst its trees. She walked firmly up the long gravel walk, then, because she was trying so hard to be bravely casual, stumbled on the doorstep and had to sit down ignominiously and rub a wounded ankle before she was able to ring the doorbell. In spite of the burden of her errand, her lips twitched humorously at one of David's old jokes.

"When you're on your way to heaven, Jeannie, you'll be sure to trip over a star and fall in head first!"

The door was opened by Mrs. Rayburn, and she and Jeannie at once smiled unreservedly at each other. There was a quiet bond of friendship between them. To Mrs. Rayburn, whose whole life had been dominated by the sombre outlook of her Jeremiah-husband, Jeannie's naturally gay spirits were a source of release. The home of the McDowell girls was one of the few places in town where Mrs. Rayburn dropped in uninvited to sit and gossip for an hour, and forget she was the minister's wife.

"Is the Doctor in?" Jeannie asked. Something in her tone indicated the errand was a serious one.

"He's in the study. Come right in, and I'll tell him you're here."

In a few minutes Jeannie was ushered into the presence of the man of God.

The study was a square room heavily shaded by the large pine trees growing near the windows. Everything inside the room suggested an ascetic moderation. The grate fire, instead of burning uproariously, was slacked down to a smoky and hesitant flame; the chairs were stiff, and the rows of books along the wall seemed to hint darkly of sin and judgment to come.

Dr. Rayburn himself was tall and thin. He had never been a ruggedly healthy man, and so all the activities of his life had been of the mind and not of the body. Jeannie, shaking hands now, noting his rusty, second best long-tailed coat and his white shirt front spotted with coffee stains, found herself remembering David's remark, "Dr. Rayburn's spiritual pessimism would probably disappear if he ate less sausage and took longer walks."

And yet she knew that he was the stuff of which martyrs were made; that he would go through fire to follow what he deemed to be the voice of duty!

"Sit down, Mrs. Richards," he was saying. "I'm afraid this room may seem chilly to you. I school myself to work in an atmosphere not too warm. Is there anything I can do for you?"

Jeannie told her story, omitting nothing. The minister's face, as she proceeded, grew more and more grave. Indeed, there was a mark of honest suffering on it for which Jeannie had not been prepared.

"This strikes me in a very vital place, Mrs. Richards. I would have counted upon Constance above every other young person in the church to stand by her principles in *any* situation. After all the pressure we have lately brought to bear against the dancing and the step we as a Session contemplate taking—this is *most* distressing, Mrs. Richards, and to me, most disheartening."

Jeannie, the gentlest soul on earth, was still a tigress roused when anything threatened her child. She leaned forwards now, her eyes very bright, her hands in her woollen mittens clutching each other.

"But, Dr. Rayburn, after all, just what *is* the sin in dancing?"

Dr. Rayburn shook his head heavily. He cleared his throat and chose his words with embarrassed care.

"You, as a woman, cannot of course realise what evil passions are excited and, I might say, at times unleashed by the dance. The—proximity of the two sexes in the excitation of this particular movement—I beg your pardon for speaking so plainly, Mrs. Richards, but without going further let me sum it up by saying that I believe every Christian ought to consider dancing one of the devices of Satan himself to lead young people into evil."

And then Jeannie did an unprecedented thing. She sat up straight, her eyes snapping.

"I think, Dr. Rayburn, that you are mistaken. There is bound to be proximity between the sexes somehow. That's Nature's business and you can't stop it. And I believe it's



as natural for young people to want to dance as—as for kittens to play! There has probably been dancing ever since the world began. Why—Dr. Rayburn, even in the Bible it says David danced before the Lord!”

Dr. Rayburn smiled bleakly.

“My dear Mrs. Richards, you are only running into confusion. David’s dance, as nearly as we can—ah—ascertain, consisted of certain—ah—leaping movements which he executed alone. He did not dance with the other sex.”

But Jeannie’s tongue was running away with her.

“Well, he probably would if it had been the fashion! I don’t think David was overparticular about how he associated with the opposite sex!”

“Mrs. Richards!” The minister’s voice was sternly shocked. “This is not like you. You are overwrought. You must try to see this in its proper light.”

“I am,” said Jeannie. “And the more light I get, the more plain it seems to me that the church is making a mountain out of a molehill. Why can’t it say: ‘Dance away, my children! Enjoy your youth while you can, only remember your Creator and be good while you’re doing it?’”

“That, I consider, is impossible.”

The sharp finality of his tone gave Jeannie pause. She suddenly realised that, by voicing her opinions so strongly, she might be making it more difficult later on for Connie. After a moment’s silence, she said very quietly, “What do you wish Constance to do now?”

Dr. Rayburn fitted the tips of the fingers of one hand carefully upon the tips of the fingers of the other. He then spread them and drew them together slowly, alternating the movement rhythmically.

“Mrs. Richards, under the circumstances I feel I can divulge to you the exact situation at this time. As you know, two weeks from Sabbath morning is the date for

our December Communion. We have announced a preparatory service for the Friday night preceding as well as for Saturday afternoon. The importance of this service cannot, of course, be overestimated. But we have also learned on good authority that the young people are planning a dance for that very Friday night. We mean to warn the ringleaders that if this is done—action will be taken!”

“You mean—you’d *put them out of the church?*” Jeannie asked breathlessly.

“What other course could we pursue?”

“Oh, *plenty* of other courses,” Jeannie whispered.

But the Doctor did not pay any heed. He was quite evidently treating her now as a wise adult handles a hysterical child.

“As to Constance,” he went on slowly, “she will of course want to make some statement to me or to the Session. She will want to explain that she was carried away by the influences that surrounded her last night, and that she regrets the action deeply and will promise not to allow herself again to be led into the way of evil. Is this not so, Mrs. Richards?”

Jeannie felt powerless. The church, all her life long, had been the towering interest of her experience outside her family, just as it had been that of her parents before her. Her unfailing allegiance would always be to it, even when she questioned the validity of its demands. Now, at any cost, Connie must be wrapped safely again in its protecting arms.

“I suppose so,” she said in a small voice.

“Good! And I might add that, in so far as Connie herself is concerned, it is possible that her own moral nature *might* not—ah—suffer from dancing. But the danger is there. And most important is her influence on other, weaker young people. St. Paul, of course, has summed it all up perfectly: ‘If meat make my brother

to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth!’”

Jeannie was entirely beaten when the Doctor began his quotation.

“St. Paul always cows me, somehow,” she thought to herself. “He’s so logical and so sure of himself. Too sure of himself, I always feel, though I know it’s wicked of me!”

She made her adieux to Dr. Rayburn and went home. The aunts of course had to be told. It was a difficult scene. Betsy wept unrestrainedly, her face drawn in lines of shock. Liza Jane, after the first outcry, set her thin lips together and went about her work with frequent heavy sighs. They both felt that a cloud hung over the family.

Connie, to get a bad business over with, had gone to Dr. Rayburn the next evening. She had found herself promising not to dance again. The words came hard. Even as she spoke them, there was running in her mind the first figure she had danced at the McIlvaine party.

*First couple out to the right!*

*Around that couple and take a little peek.*

*Back to the centre and swing your sweet.*

She walked thoughtfully back to the house, the disappointment over the lost fun gradually receding before a glow of holy virtue which was creeping upon her. Without effort she saw herself a little apart and above Huldah and Billy and the others. A kind of sanctified compensation bore her up. She, like the religious heroes of old, was suffering for conscience’ sake.

The feeling was still upon her when Billy Brown stopped one evening later at the house. Connie felt her cheeks growing warm as she saw him at the door when she went to answer the bell. Even though she knew now that she could never love Billy, she still found it pleasantly exciting to have him interested in her. She asked him

hesitantly to come in, and Billy promptly entered. Connie sat down on the sofa, and Billy sat down beside her. He had come, he said, to ask her to go with him to the big party they were getting up for a week come Friday night.

The whole menacing import of this (as she had heard it from her mother) now struck Connie sharply. She told Billy of her trip to Dr. Rayburn's study and then begged him to have nothing to do with the Friday night dance.

Billy looked serious over her story.

"Gosh! I didn't mean to get you into trouble. I'm awful sorry, Connie. But listen. What made you promise? He's got no right to make you do that! It'll be a cold day, you bet you, when he gets *me* to give up dancing! Couldn't you have just sort of edged round it?"

"No," said Connie, all unaware that the nunlike earnestness of her young face was making it all the more tantalisingly beautiful to the youth before her. "No, Billy. I did wrong to dance that night. I went against my conscience. But I never will again. And I do wish you wouldn't have anything to do with this next affair. I feel sure there will be trouble over it."

"Oh, I know what they're planning to do all right. They're going to put some of us out of the church to make an example of us. Well, let them! *I* don't care. I'd rather——"

And then Billy stopped, a curious startled look on his face.

"But maybe you would care," he said very low. "I mean, you mightn't want to go round with me if that happened. Would you?"

"No, I suppose not," Connie stammered.

Billy flung out his chin in an odd gesture of his own.

"All right," he said. "I'll stay out of this next dance. I'd just as leave."

He leaned nearer. The door into the sitting-room was

closed. They were quite alone. A hot flush mounted in his cheeks.

"When are you going to give me that kiss, Connie?" he asked thickly.

Connie drew back. She knew now that, although she and Billy were in a sense new to each other, they had already crossed the line that separates the casual from the significant, and she was afraid.

"Please, Billy! I—I don't do that sort of thing. Please don't ask me again."

Billy's arm was on the back of the sofa. His face was not far from her own.

"I've gone with lots of girls," he said. "Ever since I was fifteen I've gone out with girls. And one was always just about the same as another to me. But you're different. I—well, I want to go *steady* with you, Connie."

"Billy, I'm not sure——"

But Billy only laughed. A hearty, secure laugh. He was a Brown. He had everything: money in the bank; a rich farm waiting for him and his wife when he married. He knew he was good-looking, too, and strong as they made them. Now that he had hinted to Connie of his real feelings, he could afford to wait her own time. A girl like Connie would never throw herself at a fellow. It would be a slow courting, but that would make the end all the sweeter. The mad pulse within him was powerful, but he could restrain it. To frighten Connie even once would be to lose her, he knew.

"Say, don't look so scared. I won't ask you again—not for a long time. Honest! It just slipped out because you look awful pretty to-night. I've got to be going along now anyway. And—well—I'll just keep out of that next dance."

When Connie had said good-bye at the front door, she walked slowly through the hall, a little dazed with the reality facing her. It was unmistakably clear now that

Billy's intention towards her was marriage. Was it a foolish, oversentimental feeling in her own breast that made her consider this impossible? Or was it some deep sense of values compounded with the elements of her being? Connie did not know. She felt both proud and distressed.

As she stepped softly into the kitchen she saw a caller in the sitting-room who must have entered by way of the back door. It was old Mrs. Woods, who lived farther down the street. Her grey shawl was thrown over the back of her chair, a sure indication she meant to spend the evening. Connie watched the old woman with affectionate eyes. Her face was wrinkled in a hundred queer designs; her grey hair was thin and scarcely made a twist large enough to hold the wire hairpins; but her eyes twinkled behind her steel-rimmed glasses, and there was about her thin, stooped body a resiliency, a nonchalance towards the passing of the years. She had never borne a child, but there were always small feet coming and going in her house. On her pantry shelves she kept old flour sacks carefully folded. These could be exchanged for a penny's worth of candy at Galloway's. She also kept a large china tureen filled with ginger cookies in her kitchen cupboard. There was a quaint game, too, called *Anabasis*, as well as checkers and dominoes on the side table along with her books.

Her home had always been a happy place to Constance. It stood below the church, surrounded by a small apple orchard. The long back porch, scrupulously scrubbed, had latticework across the end, shutting out summer sun and winter gales. The kitchen was large and comfortable. A shining stove, a table covered by a bright cloth, a long handsome sideboard which antique dealers were one day to quarrel over; and high-backed rocking chairs of a quaint woven willow design and red cushions.

The only other downstairs room, the parlour, had no



fire in winter except on company days. But Connie, like all the children then and later, loved the kitchen best.

Mrs. Woods was in the midst of a story now, and Connie stood, unperceived, listening.

"It just reminds me of the time right after I was married when I ground the coffee. You see, Mr. Woods was just over from Scotland—free kirk and strict for that—and he thought it was a sin even to spit on the Sabbath, so I had to do all my work on Saturday. And this time I forgot to grind the coffee. I was young and a bit heedless and hadn't been brought up to be so strict. So on Sabbath morning I just whipped the coffee mill under my apron and ran out to the woodshed and was grinding away when who should confront me but Mr. Woods himself. 'Elizabeth,' says he, 'don't you know the Lord can see you here as well as in the kitchen?' And I says: 'Indeed, it's not the Lord I'm afraid of, Mr. Woods. It's you!'"

The women all laughed, even Liza Jane, though her face grew grave again as Mrs. Woods continued:

"It's about like that with all this dancing trouble. It's not the Lord's displeasure that's botherin' people, it's the *Session's*!"

"But we have to yield a lawful obedience to them in authority over us," Liza Jane said sharply. "And the whole matter is serious enough—no cause for jesting."

Jeannie's face, too, was troubled.

"Yes," she said, "I sort of dread to see the next weeks come. There's sure to be hard feelings if things come to a head."

Connie didn't wait to hear more. She slipped up to her own room. Since Uncle David had had the hot-air furnace put in for them, it was a joy to retreat sometimes to her own tiny sanctuary and think her thoughts alone—though she was escaping only from the aunts. She and Jeannie were as one in each other's presence.

By the end of the next two weeks, events had moved swiftly. It was the talk amongst the men standing about

the back counters in Galloway's, or waiting outside the post office; the news buzzed along the party-line telephones, and women hurriedly removed their hands from the dish-pan or the pie-crust and ran to their neighbour's back doors with the story.

The Session of the Presbyterian Church had warned four young men, Jim Wilson, Don Bell, Jack McIlvaine, and Billy Brown, that if they held a dance on the Friday night of the church service, they would be dropped from church membership. The dance was held—the biggest one of the year. But it seemed that Billy Brown had for once taken no part in it. Conjecture was lively on this point. The other three, however, had carried things off with a high hand. Report said the dancing lasted till daylight, though some doubted that. But, most brazen of all, they had mailed an invitation to Dr. Rayburn and the Elders themselves! After that of course there could be no hope of leniency. Their names were to be read out at the Sunday morning service.

But by Saturday night there was something still more serious to discuss. Following the afternoon preparatory service the Session had convened as usual to meet any one wishing to unite with the church. Two young girls waited for that purpose. One was Tillie Hastings, foundling, who was being reared by the Bell family; the other was Jennie Henderson, Huldah's young sister. Both girls were of the age to come into the church and had been urged by their Sunday-school teacher and pastor to do so. Jennie especially was eager to become a church member. She was the direct opposite of Huldah, a slim, frail little person, shy and sensitive and abnormally conscientious.

Connie, waiting at the Sunday-school organ with some of the choir for a last practice, saw Tillie come out first from the small room off the hallway where the Session met, with a scarlet face and tears imminent. She was

struck with a cold fear, however, when Jennie Henderson emerged. For her slim face was white as death, and there was something like despair written upon it.

By the evening every one knew what had happened. Dr. Rayburn, who for weeks had thought of nothing but the situation amongst the young people, culminating in the ultimatum to the ringleaders of the crowd, had worked himself up to a zealot's fever heat. He saw himself as a prophet of the Lord, purging the church of worldliness and wickedness. In this mood he had done something never done before. He had asked the two young applicants point-blank for their solemn promise never to dance or play cards. When they declined to promise, he had prayed over them, his voice shaking with earnestness, and then, finding no change in the girls except an increased pallor on Jennie's face, he had announced that until they were ready to fulfil this condition they must remain outside the fold of the church. He had added a final warning made up of such biblical admonitions as: "Be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not . . ." "The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." "But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."

And the two little fourteen-year-olds had left the church with the gates of Paradise figuratively shut in their faces, while Dr. Rayburn remained to discuss the matter with his Session. Most of the men were in entire accord with him. There was in their minds a genuine conscientious conviction, mingled with that mysterious thrill which comes along with wielded power. They were, in a melancholy fashion, enjoying themselves.

Several members of the Session inwardly disagreed with their brethren. They were men of a more gentle mould who recalled vividly their own youth. They were men born for tolerance in all things. But their very mildness of

spirit prevented them from taking violent issue with their pastor. Besides, they questioned the integrity of their own leniency. They reminded themselves of the loyalty they had pledged to the church and its minister, and raised no voice.

So the matter stood. So the news of it spread. Terese was one of the first to hear of it, as she always did hear all the news at the post office when she went for the evening mail. She came straight up the back street towards the McDowells', her black eyes burning with emotion. The weight of her own conscience had never been heavier. No one in town, she felt sure, knew of her guilt, except possibly Jeannie. She had wondered at times about her. But Terese knew the load on her own heart whenever Communion Sunday approached. She tried to keep her church attendance irregular enough for her absence on these marked Sundays four times a year not to excite comment. Mrs. Forsythe's increasing feebleness made this easier. But all the same, Terese, who had been caught up in a vision at her first Communion back in the old church at Confluence, felt often a bitter pang of hunger and of shame. The whole life of the church had become increasingly precious to her during those years when she had lost David and set her face absolutely against any other love. With her intense and passionate nature she had invested the bare Calvinistic services with the moving emotional quality of a colourful ritual. The church bell through the early winter dusk, the tall lighted windows sending shafts of pale radiance over the drifted snow, the burst of voices in the Doxology, the hush of the benediction—all of this had become something for her strong nature to fasten itself upon. But most of all the service of the Eucharist, the solemn silence, except for the feet of the moving Elders as they passed the elements, the subdued tears of the women, the far-away vision of the dying Christ. . . .

Terese had lost all this, given it up of her own conscience when she and David had become lovers in fact. In comparison with the abyss of joy in her union with him, this loss was of relatively slight depth, and yet it rose constantly to haunt her. Now as she hurried towards the McDowells' a new distress coloured it.

"What does Dr. Rayburn think sin is, anyway?" she said to herself chokingly. "He and the Session! How can they hound these youngsters and even keep them out of the church, all on account of dancing! *Dancing!* O God, and *me* still in the church and plenty more besides that know what real sin is! Two little girls kept out, and *me* still a member! I ought to do something. But how could I? It would hurt too many besides me!"

She went along the broken stone walk to the kitchen door and entered. Jeannie, always curiously sensitive to the moods of those about her, started in alarm at sight of Terese's face. No one realised until later that her question gave away her knowledge of the secret.

"Oh, Terese!" she cried in terror. "*Is it David?*"

Terese was quick-witted for Connie's sake.

"No, there was no mail for you. I just heard something down street. . . ."

She told them. But even before the first outcries and comments were fairly silenced, there was another step on the walk and a knock at the back door. When Connie ran to open it, it was Huldah Henderson, delivering their weekly roll of butter. Connie welcomed her warmly and ushered her into the sitting-room. But Huldah looked strange. There was something frightening in the sight of her round rosy, laughing face now drawn in hard lines.

"I s'pose you've all heard the news," she burst out. "They won't take Jennie and Tillie Hastings into the church! And Jennie's home now crying herself sick. . . . She couldn't eat a bite of supper—she thinks she's disgraced. And her an angel on earth if there ever was one!"



Oh, I tell you this' has taken every bit of religion I ever had out of me! I hate them all—Dr. Rayburn and the Session! Every one of them! And there's one thing sure. Not one of our family is ever going to set foot in their church again! Never!"

"Oh, Huldah!" Jeannie cried. "Oh, don't say what you'll regret, child!"

"I won't regret it. That's the truth. You'll see."

And then Huldah's face crumpled suddenly into tears.

"If it had only been me," she sobbed, "I could have stood it. But *Jennie!* Why, we've always thought she was too good for this world. And it wasn't even her fault she held out against the Session. Father told her before she left she was not to make any promises on the dancing. But we never really thought they'd put it to them point-blank. Oh, it's an awful thing for Jennie."

Betsy was weeping, too, copiously as she always did if there was the slightest provocation, and even Liza Jane's face was deeply moved. Jeannie was the one to speak, though her voice was not steady.

"Huldah, it all seems to me like a sad blunder; but try not to be too bitter about it. I know it's hard now, but some day it will be straightened out. Oh, I keep wishing it was James—my husband—that was handling it! He was so tender with the young folks, with everybody for that matter. . . . Don't feel too badly, Huldah. . . . Connie, why don't you and Huldah go into the parlour and talk about Institute?"

"Wait, I'll pay her first for the butter," Liza Jane said, always practical no matter what the emotional stress.

Huldah stopped weeping as Jeannie had thought she would when the two girls were in the parlour. The women, listening, could hear them at last making plans for the following week. But a heaviness hung upon the household even when Terese and Huldah had gone. While Liza Jane wound the clock, Betsy stopped Connie at the stairs.



"Do let this be a lesson to you," she began tremulously, "no matter how great the temptation, never to indulge in worldly amusements again! Oh, this ought to be a time of heart searching for all young people!"

"Yes, Aunt Betsy," Connie responded dutifully. As a matter of fact her heart did still feel an uncomfortable sense of humiliation that she had been in any way connected with the present crisis. But at least she was securely reinstated.

Sundays in New Salem in this year of grace were, as Liza Jane often lamented, very lax compared with those of the old days back on the farm. In the McDowell-Richards' household the family began the day with a slight concession to the flesh, by sleeping until eight o'clock. Connie usually ate her breakfast with her Sunday-school lesson propped up in front of her, which always elicited the worried remark from the aunts that all that should have been attended to the evening before.

Moreover, since Betsy was not able to go to church, it had gradually become the custom for her to cook a hot dinner fresh from the start during the morning. Even as she did it, she often muttered to herself, "What would Father say about this!"

The whole scheme of living as the little town of New Salem knew it then, was altered from the old pattern. True, everybody attended divine service at one or other of the churches, with only a very few glaring exceptions such as old Mr. Crew, who was *an atheist*, and the shiftless Beam family, who supported life somehow (and added frequently to it) without benefit of either clergy or doctors.

But, even though all the good townsfolk in their best clothes made their way to Dame Street on a Sabbath morning, those who remembered the old days could note a decided change of attitude and manner. People chatted brightly on their way to the sanctuary about worldly affairs; there was even a laugh heard frequently at the

church door itself; there were socials and missionary teas and young people's meetings. All well enough, Liza Jane admitted, but she could pick out many a child in the congregation—and name them out, too, if she had to—who couldn't say the Shorter Catechism through to save their lives! And as to that, there were all too many of the middle-aged people who couldn't run you off "effectual calling" without a mistake. More shame to them!

Yes, the times were lax. Many a farmer began to sit uneasy in his pew when Dr. Rayburn reached an hour. How would he have tholed the two sermons old Dr. McFeeters used to drone off without lifting his voice?

There was some visiting done now, too, on the Sabbath, and a few of the more dashing young blades took their girls buggy-riding in the afternoon. But still more insidious influences were abroad. For the first time a Sunday paper had made its appearance in the town. This manifestation of the devil had its origin in one of those dubious dwellings beyond the creek which had sprung up with the coming of the coal industry. The men who lived in these houses plied a composite trade calculated to satisfy the various wants of the Italians and Slavs and Poles who lived in the "patch" a few miles off and came to the outskirts of New Salem for their pleasures on a Saturday night.

Certain of the more militant members of the W.C.T.U. had taken their lives and their long skirts in their hands and gone over to interview Mike Gafferty, who was the prime mover in all these iniquitous proceedings. They pointed out sternly to him that, for twenty-five years now, New Salem had been a temperance town under local option, and it would brook no infringement. While Mike continued to stare at them blandly out of large watery blue eyes, they fumbled with their words and wound up, woman-fashion, by melting into tearful beseechings that,

if he *was* trafficking with liquor just outside the borough line, he would *please* either stop it or move away! "*Think*," they always ended, "of our young people!"

But they came home baffled, as did Dr. Rayburn and some of the other ministers who went to interview Gafferty. Mike agreed gently with everything they said, acted as though deeply moved over the scriptural passages quoted, spat into the distance with the abandonment of genuine conversion—and kept on providing beer and other delights for the hunkies or any one else who cared to come. When he began delivering Sunday papers which he brought from Greensburg, there were those in town who felt that the curse of Sodom could not be far from them.

On this December Sunday morning the church bells sounded, sharply clear, through the frosty air, and a pale sun shone on the snowy walks over which passed the church-going feet. But among the Presbyterians that day there were many worshippers who could not join in the opening service because their hearts and lips were numb with shock. For the pews of the Hendersons, the Browns, the Bells, the Wilsons, and the McIlvaines were vacant. They stood out now in their glaring emptiness, their silence shouting aloud above the hymns and the prayer.

Just before the sermon Dr. Rayburn, his dark eyes sunken in their sockets after the vigils of the night and his voice harsh in his effort to keep it from breaking, read the report from the Session with the names of the young men who had been suspended from church membership. The hush that followed was of the kind that made the mere acts of breathing and swallowing explosive sounds. People, looking guardedly at one another, spoke eloquently with their eyes, and when the service was finally over, in spite of the cold, many groups stood about the churchyard talking in low tones.

Liza Jane recounted it all to Betsy when they got home.

"I'm a little surprised at the Browns, and yet Matilda, of course, having been a Henderson, would naturally side with her brother's family. You see, for some reason Billy himself wasn't in the mix. Well, it makes a big gap in our church, I tell you, if they all leave. It's a bad business!"

"Where do you suppose they'll go to?"

"Oh, to the U.P.'s here, or back to Confluence, most likely. It's just about as near for most of them."

Jeannie and Connie said little during the meal. They both felt the pain of it all more than the others. But after dinner the peaceful routine of the day fell upon them. They all sat in the small sitting-room, a plate of Rambo apples within reach on the table. They handled their books quietly as the lumps of soft coal blazed and glowed and sank to embers in the grate. Jeannie read from the large brown Bible; Connie worked over her speech for the Christian Endeavour meeting, culling careful quotations from the *Presbyterian Banner*.

Through the west window, as the afternoon waned, the farther hills became lighted with a golden sunset, and then paled to a pinkish afterglow with the first evening stars. Jeannie lighted the lamps, Liza Jane put on the tea-kettle, and Connie ran to dress for her meeting.

She was conscious of the enfolding security of her own life as she moved about her small chamber. Each homely habit of the day held in it the warm overtones of love. This thought continued with her later as she walked through the starry dusk down the street once again to church. The night was white, and the wind made a faint stirring in the pine trees along the creek bank just behind. All the ardour of her sensitive, adoring nature was poured out in a sudden devotion to the religious associations of her life, interwoven as they were with her overwhelming love for her mother and the lesser and yet tender affection for the aunts. Everything, she realised, in her guarded, carefully tended years had set her feet in

the path in which they were now walking. While her father's death had kept her from being literally a daughter of the manse, as was her heritage, she was, in a much deeper sense, a child of the church. From her mother's breast she had drawn not only physical sustenance but just as surely "that sincere milk of the Word," which had nourished her forebears for generations.

As she walked slowly on, her face often raised to the stars, she vowed with the white fervour of a young novice that nothing all her life long should ever change for her that sum of habits and beliefs which she knew as *religion*.

She made an unusually earnest speech in Christian Endeavour, sang "Sun of My Soul" in the choir with eyes fixed far above the heads of the congregation (though she couldn't help seeing Billy Brown in the back seat with his gaze bent on her), listened later at home to Aunt Liza's voice in the final worship of the day, heard from her bed the slow tones of the old clock striking ten, and knew that a strange Sabbath for her and for many others in New Salem had ended.

Just before she settled herself to sleep, however, she jumped out of bed quickly, the rapt expression on her face completely obliterated. She picked up the alarm clock, shook it gently, tested the alarm, and then with a purely secular happiness of expression crawled back into bed. Not even Aunt Liza must be trusted to waken the household the next morning! For the sun would rise to-morrow on the biggest event of the school-teacher's year—the County Institute in Greensburg! And what, after all, her subconscious thoughts flowed drowsily, were wars in far Japan or vicissitudes of church and state? For a whole week she was to board in the county seat, have her ruffled rose dress to wear to the night lectures, and, most thrilling of all, go to the hotel one night for dinner! Connie's cheek sank more deeply into the pillow—and she slept.



## CHAPTER IV

WHEN SHE REACHED THE RAILROAD NEXT MORNING, Connie's hands were stiff with cold, and her suitcase decidedly heavy. It was a long walk, all the length of Main Street, past the post office ("Well, Connie, off for Institute, I suppose! Don't get too highfalutin' in the big town!"), on down the hill past Galloway's ("So, Connie, this is the big week for the schoolmarms! Don't let anybody run off with you in the county seat!"), and still farther to the long covered wooden bridge over the Loyalhanna, with the muddy waters showing plainly through the wide cracks as she trod with moderate ease the great central beam that divided the bridge floor in half.

Once over the creek, there was a short, brisk upward climb, and the station was reached. There was plenty of stir around it this Monday morning, and Connie thrilled to the excitement of it. She pushed open the door with numb fingers and entered the hot, dusty, smoky, steamy atmosphere of the waiting-room. The big iron "egg" stove in the centre was red-hot, while the west windows were still white with frost.

Several milk-shipping farmers in cloth caps with fur earlugs, worn overcoats, and felt boots, stood about the stove, warming their hands; and over in the corner stood Huldah with a group of other girls who taught in Ferry and Galen townships, all atingle with the unusual business of travel, and the anticipation of the week to come.

As Connie was turning away from the ticket window, the outer door slammed, and Billy Brown entered the waiting-room looking twice as large in his working



clothes as in his Sunday suit. He came straight to her while the group of girls stopped talking to watch.

"Well," he said, looking at her in his intent fashion, "I s'pose you're off to the big town this morning! Say!" He lowered his voice. "I might have an errand into Greensburg about Wednesday. How about going along with you to the night lecture?"

"Why, of course," Connie stammered.

"All right then, see you Wednesday."

He spoke to Huldah, and with the full assurance that his position gave him, chaffed the other girls, who blushed with pleasure at his notice, and then, as the noise of the train became apparent, picked up Connie's suitcase (and Huldah's as an afterthought) and helped them get settled in the coach. Just as he was leaving, he leaned nearer Huldah.

"How's Jennie now?" he asked.

Huldah shook her head, and her eyes filled.

"Not very good," she said in a low voice.

"Mother's going over to-day," Billy answered. Then the train whistled, and with a last look at Constance, Billy ran down the aisle and made what to the girls was a daring jump, from the steps to the platform.

Huldah and Connie sat with their heads close, discussing the excitements of the week. Huldah was full of questions about Billy. How long had it been going on? You could tell by the way he looked at Connie he was serious! Jack McIlvaine was coming in Wednesday night to take her to the lecture. And Billy and Connie! Why, it was perfect! Jack said they might get in by afternoon. If *only* the boys would think of taking them to the hotel for dinner! But she knew they would never do that. They could well afford it, too, but they just didn't know how to do things like city men. But anyway she and Connie would go themselves Thursday night. So there would be two big nights in the week.

Connie felt her heart beating quickly. For the first time she would have a beau at Institute. She had been too quick perhaps to criticise Billy when he was bringing her all this pleasure.

The famous Westmoreland County Teachers' Institute met in the large High School building that crowned one of the Greensburg hills, facing towards its more prominent sister-edifice, the Courthouse, a little farther down. Here each year, the week before Christmas, gathered some eight hundred teachers to drink in culture, absorb new professional methods, eat candy out of paper "pokes" in the back seats, tell stories behind the bulky *Illuminator* programmes, and develop new and passionate interests in the opposite sex to such an extent that often before the next year was over many a couple returned to the Courthouse down the hill for a marriage licence!

There were experienced teachers amongst the crowds in the halls that first day of registering—mature women a trifle bored with the whole affair, assured in all their actions, dressed in the latest fashion from their comfortably secure incomes; there were young girls of seventeen from remote country districts in poorly-fitting suits paid for out of a salary of thirty-five dollars a month, awkward and timid in the unaccustomed crowd, but with eyes shining at the magnificent novelty of it all.

There were men, too, of all types: suave high-school principals and pimply youths fresh from the farm, teaching in the little red schoolhouses in distant clearings to earn money for college. Over them all, like to a god—in the eyes of the lesser folk at least—towered the County Superintendent, going here and there on errands of his own, stopping now and then to speak to a favoured few, busy with the heavy responsibilities of the week. It was he, along with his assistants, who held the examinations in scattered schoolhouses each summer which decided who should have the right to teach, and who

issued the thin blue paper certificats which represented to many the passport to a heaven of opportunity. He visited the schools during the year, too, driving up in his smart buggy usually, it seemed to fluttered young country teachers, on the days when the stove flue smoked or the children were all coming down with measles!

On Monday afternoon the first session of the Institute got under way, and by Wednesday Connie felt as though she had done nothing all year but attend lectures. She and Huldah took notes assiduously, were entertained by their own small jokes, and watched with avidity the big world of people around them.

Their boarding place was pleasant and presented exciting differences from home: the distant sound of trains constantly coming and going; the odour of gas in their bedroom fireplace and flaring jet; the horses' feet on the paved streets; the bathroom! First, last, and most of all, the bathroom!

On Wednesday afternoon the girls, who had thoughtfully seated themselves near the door, nudged each other sharply. Billy Brown and Jack McIlvaine were standing just inside the wide side entrance to the auditorium, carefully scanning the crowd. Huldah lifted a hand, and in a few minutes the boys had seen them. Huldah and Connie removed their coats from the seats beside them, and the young men edged along the row and seated themselves with a nice enough bit of confusion to centre the attention of that whole section upon the two couples.

Billy's face was flushed as he looked at Connie. He leaned closer until his arm pressed hard against hers.

"You don't have to listen to this stuff, do you?" he asked in a loud whisper.

As a matter of fact, the lecture under way was of especial interest to Connie. It was given by Dr. Warre, a professor in an eastern college, and dealt with nine-

teenth-century poets, among whom were her chief gods. But at her other side Huldah whispered back that the speaker was "dull as dish-water," and at once started an animated, noiseless conversation by means of signs and smiles and nods. Billy seemed quite content to lean close to Connie, fingering her purse, her gloves, her programme, managing to touch her hands frequently, whispering when he dared—and Connie missed Browning and Tennyson!

At the evening lecture she tried to pretend she was entirely happy. They had excellent seats near the front. Amongst vast billows of unattended young females she and Huldah had good-looking male escorts. There was a thrill of pride in that. Billy kept his promise, too, as he said good-bye at their boarding house. He didn't ask for a kiss, even, though it was pretty clear that Jack's evening was crowned in that fashion. And yet—and yet—as Connie lay wakeful in the big walnut bed listening to the muted whistle and roar of the trains, her heart went the rounds of her problem again. In every way Billy was a suitable young man for her to marry. Why couldn't she accept his attentions with satisfaction? Why could she not take life as she found it, like Huldah, for instance?

The next day something happened to Huldah. A tall young man with red hair and glasses who had been casting glances in her direction found some one to introduce him to her at the morning recess, and all through the afternoon they sat together. Connie drifted off with some other girls she knew, amused at Huldah's unfailing popularity even in strange places.

The young man was a high-school teacher from Latrobe, and was staying at the hotel. All the Latrobe crowd were staying there, Huldah told Connie as they dressed that evening. She had met some of them at dances. They would be sure to see them at dinner.

To Connie the matter of going to the Palace Hotel for dinner (at a cost of seventy-five cents!) was a momentous thing. In all her life she had eaten at a hotel but once before—that was with Uncle David in Pittsburgh. It was the only time she had had the strange and delightful sense of being a part of the great world of wealth and fashion which lay outside her experience.

As to the Palace, here in Greensburg, she had glimpsed its splendours wistfully on many occasions. There were coloured waiters in the dining-room, and an orchestra half hidden by palms. Just to walk through the hotel lobby would be something. But to eat dinner there!

The girls did not hurry. It was more fashionable, Huldah said, to eat as late as you could. When they reached the hotel at last they sat for some time in the lobby watching the people coming and going, enjoying the delicious sensation of knowing that, whenever they wished, they could saunter through the magic doors into the dining-room.

At last Huldah pronounced it time. They moved slowly, acutely conscious of themselves, towards the entrance where the head waiter stood in evening clothes. Beyond him there came a burst of lights and music and the sound of many people dining.

He intercepted them now.

"You wished dinner?" he asked with an accent.

"For two," Huldah said with dignity.

He shook his head and scanned the crowded room.

"I am sorry. You should have made reservations. There are no more places. I cannot seat you until perhaps eight."

"But the lecture begins at eight," the girls cried in one breath, their faces stricken with disappointment.

The waiter was looking over the room again.

"Do you know any one dining here?" he asked.

Huldah had already seen her rusty-haired swain sitting



with a group of young people at one of the largest tables near the middle of the room. She indicated them to the head waiter.

"I might set one more place there," he said, "but only one. So I cannot seat you together. For the other young lady," he added, turning to Connie, "there is one place at the small table for two there by the wall, if you wish. There will be later a young gentleman at the other place. Is that agreeable?"

Connie looked at Huldah. Surely, after all their weeks of planning, Huldah would not do this to her—would not go to the gay centre table with the other young people and leave her *alone*, or even worse, with a stranger at the small table along the wall!

"Huldah," she began in a small voice; but Huldah was already excitedly cheerful.

"I guess it's the best we can do, isn't it, Connie? I'm awful sorry we can't sit together, but the dinner'll taste the same, anyway. It's lucky I know that Latrobe crowd, or we wouldn't have got in at all. Well, what do you say, Connie? Will we tell him to go ahead and fix us up that way?"

"I suppose so," Connie said very low. She bit her lips for a moment and then managed honestly, "I know it's all we can do now, with dinner over at the boarding house. Go on, Huldah, and have a good time."

Huldah's natural kindliness came to the surface then.

"You go to the big table, Connie! Honest, I don't care! You can tell them you're my friend——"

"Huldah, you're sweet. Of course I won't. I don't know a soul there. Go right on and enjoy yourself. I'll be all right!"

The waiter was already signing to her. She walked over to the small table and sat down. She could hear the acclaim with which Huldah was received by the



Latrobe crowd. All the gaiety of the room seemed to eddy and swirl about the group.

Connie laid aside her coat and sat up very prim and straight in her chair, holding the menu card tightly with cold fingers. It was absurd, she told herself, to feel so bitterly disappointed. But she had looked forward to it so! And seventy-five cents was such an *awful* price to pay for a dinner you weren't going to enjoy.

She sat facing the dining-room entrance and the lobby, so she saw him as he crossed from the elevator to the desk. He was handed a letter which he opened carelessly and read as though letters were common and casual occurrences. He straightened then, putting the envelope in his pocket, and walked towards the dining-room. And even as she looked at him Connie felt a warmth creep over her, as though all the blood in her body had been heated by strange wine. She saw him speak to the head waiter and then come slowly towards the table, his eyes upon her. Connie meant to drop her own, but she could not. So they watched each other with a kind of grave amazement as though they had neither asked nor expected this of life, while he approached and bowed beside his chair.

"I hope you don't mind," he said slowly. "I usually sit here with my uncle, but he's dining with some school men to-night."

"Oh, I am the one who's intruding, really," Connie began as he seated himself. "My friend, Huldah Henderson, and I came late, and this was the only arrangement the head waiter could make. Huldah is over at the centre table."

"I suppose I should offer to change places with her at once," the young man said slowly, while Connie's heart missed a beat. "But I'm not going to. You see—it might make too much trouble for our friend the head waiter. And I have suddenly the warmest feeling for him."

And then they both laughed, his gray eyes holding her dark ones strongly to him as though in an embrace.

He happened to be in Greensburg because his uncle, Dr. Warre, was one of the Institute lecturers and was, in fact, the speaker that night. He hadn't been well, so the family hadn't wanted him to come alone. His own name was Ian Donaldson, and he was in his second year at Union Theological. His parents, both dead, had been Scotch, and he himself had been born in Edinburgh, but had lived in this country with his uncle since he was twelve.

Connie introduced herself, but the mere particulars of birth and residence were brushed quickly aside. What did it matter who they were or where they had lived? The miracle was that they were here together now, with but the tiny stretch of white cloth between them, hands almost touching, eyes demanding their fill, and then dropping again before the mystery of a revealed and alluring personality.

There was no end to what they found to say to each other. They were deep in Browning when Huldah and her red-haired admirer stopped at the table. Huldah's eyebrows raised in a huge interrogation.

"It's just about time to go, Connie. We can wait in the lobby for you——"

Ian had risen, showing suddenly by comparison how tall he was. He acknowledged the introductions easily, then turned again quickly to Connie.

"May I not take you up to the lecture when we've finished dinner? I should go to it myself, you know. Can't I get some tickets at the door?"

Connie murmured an assent, her cheeks warm under Huldah's interested scrutiny. Then the other two passed on, and she and Ian were once more alone, leaning near across the small table, absorbed again in Browning and in the fresh delights of their own minds.

"Do you know 'A Grammarian's Funeral'?" Ian asked eagerly.

"Oh, yes! I love it!"

"There's meat in that. I keep thinking of the old chap pegging away at his Greek particles even when he was dead from the waist down, sure he'd get a chance to finish up the job and do all the other things he hadn't had time for here."

"I know," Connie answered. "'Leave Now for dogs and apes, Man has Forever.'"

"That's it! The long look ahead. Doesn't it change things, though? Staking neck or nothing on a life to come! Keeps us from being too fussy over affairs here, I guess."

Then he broke off. Connie's face was shining with what Jeannie would have called her "alabaster lamp look"—a delicate radiance of the spirit. Ian lowered his eyes.

"Forever," he said slowly, as though the idea had taken on a new significance. "I like that word—*forever*."

They were the last to leave the dining-room. When Connie brought forth her precious seventy-five cents Ian demurred earnestly.

"No, please! I want you to be my guest to-night. I won't consider anything else. *Please!*"

Connie watched with admiration the easy, accustomed way in which he paid the bill, left the tip, which she would never have thought of, and then waved the waiter quite definitely aside so that he himself could help her on with her coat. And for the first time her heart bitterly rebelled against a lining that was not silk!

"Will you wait in the lobby till I get my coat and hat?" he asked.

In a few minutes they were out in the frosty air, walking slowly up the long hill. If it had been sweet to face each other across the small table, it was doubly

so to be out alone in the darkness, his arm guiding her. They talked on earnestly like old friends who had an absence of many years to bridge quickly. She told him then of Jeannie. It seemed natural to speak of her under the stars. She spoke of Uncle David, and the coal under the old farm, which now had a chance of selling.

Ian was interested in it all, but as they neared the high-school building he grew silent.

"We're taking the midnight train back east," he said soberly. "I can't quite express what this evening has been to me. May I write to you, Miss Richards?"

"Oh, I'd like you to," Connie answered quickly.

"And you'll be sure to answer?"

"I promise."

Late that night in their high walnut bed the two girls lay talking. Huldah had had, according to her lights, a great evening. She was enthusiastic about the appearance of Connie's table companion, but retracted part of her encomiums when she found he was going to be a minister.

"I want no truck with preachers myself," she said bitterly, "after what happened last week. I've got no religion left in me, Connie. Don't let's talk about it."

Then, changing quickly, she said, "But wasn't the hotel dinner *grand*?"

And Connie, with a queer realisation of the significance of the confession, whispered back, "I don't know one thing I ate!"

Huldah pondered this unfathomable mystery till sleep finally overtook her.

Jeannie had driven over to meet the train the next evening as it arrived at New Salem. Her face in a white fascinator shone out from amongst the small crowd on the platform, eager and smiling. Connie flew towards her, and in a moment they had unhitched old Nell and

were driving up the snowy street. As usual, they both talked at once, until the first news had been given. Uncle David had made a special trip out on Wednesday with his lawyer to go over the coal situation again, and they had decided definitely to take the matter to court when the case could be got ready. David still had doubts as to the outcome, but the lawyer, Mr. Harrington, who seemed a very nice man, was quite optimistic.

Connie told all her superficial doings, but she could not speak just then of Ian. That would come later. The aunts were waiting, all agog to hear the details of the week. Connie gave them with animation as they ate supper.

When Terese came for her nightly visit on her way home from the post office, she had a letter for Connie, addressed in a firm, distinctive backhand.

"Why, who's that from?" Liza Jane inquired in surprise as she passed it slowly over.

"I don't know," Connie murmured.

But she did. They all sat around silent, waiting, as was the family custom, to hear what the letter contained. Jeannie's efforts to divert them were fruitless.

Connie opened the letter, her heart beating quickly as she scanned it:

DEAR MISS RICHARDS:

I have only a few minutes before our train leaves, but I must tell you again how very much our unexpected meeting means to me. For the first time I regret being located in New York instead of—Pittsburgh, for instance! But if it is agreeable to you I should like, before too many months, to come out to New Salem. Meantime, thank fortune, there can be letters if you are willing.

With thanks again for my wonderful evening, and hoping to hear from you soon, I am,

Most sincerely yours,

IAN DONALDSON.

"Well," said Betsy, "aren't you going to read it aloud as follows?"

Connie slipped the letter back in its envelope, her cheeks flaming.

"Oh, it's nothing," she said. "Just a note from a young man I met the night we went to the hotel. He is the nephew of one of the lecturers."

"That's nice," said Jeannie diplomatically. "How's the weather now, Terese? More snow?"

"What's his business?" Liza Jane pursued sharply.

"He's going to be a minister. He's at Union Seminary," Connie said briefly.

"Well, he couldn't find a better calling."

The subject was grudgingly dismissed; but when they were at last in bed Liza Jane and Betsy threshed it all over.

"Billy Brown'll have to take a back seat now, I doubt. I hope Matilda won't hold it against us if Connie turns Billy down."

"Oh, she may never hear from this young fellow again. I hope she'll treat Billy right till she's sure."

"Yes, whoever gets Billy will sit down in a butter-keg."

"But still—a *minister*. . . ."

"Oh, yes, that's of course the best we could ever wish for."

Later, Betsy touched Liza Jane.

"Are you asleep? Well, I've just thought. Isn't it Union Seminary that's supposed to be not quite *sound* in its theology?"

"That's what they say."

"My, I hope this young fellow is not—— You're *sure* he's a Presbyterian?"

"Yes, I asked Connie specially."

"Well, that's something to be thankful for! I think I'll turn on my other side now and try to get a sleep."



In the other room, Jeannie was pushing back the little curls that still persisted in getting into her eyes, and by the lamp was reading Connie's letter at the girl's request.

"I like it," she said emphatically, "and I think, from all you say, I'd like him, Connie. There's a straightforward ring about this, and his handwriting shows character. You must answer it, of course—soon."

And then she kissed Connie wistfully, suspecting that love at last had touched her child, and that there was one gate through which they could not pass together.

The time from Christmas until spring was punctuated by several happenings in New Salem. Mrs. Forsythe died in January, leaving Terese sole possessor of the big house and the modestly-sufficient income. Big Bob had owned two rich farms, and they had sold to advantage. Terese stayed on in the white house alone, except for those nights. . . . No one but the three McDowell girls, lying wakeful for the sound of a door closing, knew of those nights.

Terese, at fifty-two, was an exceptionally handsome woman. Her dark hair was scarcely touched with gray, and her colour was still striking. Perhaps because she had known only the flood moments of love without the low-tide cares and anxieties of family life, her face had remained unlined. Strangers in town, drummers standing about the Stone Hotel or waiting in Galloway's, followed her with their eyes and, noting no wedding ring on her finger, would ask under a quizzical eyebrow, "Who's that woman?" For the beautiful curve of her breasts, every graceful turn of neck or wrist or thigh, revealed a body voluptuously enticing. But if, emboldened, one of these travelling salesmen managed to look full into her face he received a shock. For the eyes, dark and deeply fringed, repulsed him with a peculiar remoteness. And from his man's experience he knew

that here was a woman more wedded than most wives.

Terese spent much time now in the McDowell house. She helped Betsy with her quilting, or did fine stitching on some garment for Connie, often bringing with her a basket of eggs or a crock of sausage, explaining with her warm smile that if she were pressed she might stay to supper. Jeannie, especially, took pleasure in these long winter afternoons when they sewed together, talking over old times, and watched the window for the sight of old Nell appearing around the corner, bringing Connie from school.

The town, after the first throes of shock and discussion caused by the dancing crisis, had settled down to ordinary living with, if possible, an added intensity of interest in all church activities. The Presbyterian congregation girded up its loins, determined that its depleted ranks should be filled up. While there was a great deal of quiet sympathy for the families that had left the church because of the trouble, there was also among the remaining members a loyal rallying to the support of its various organisations, as children staunchly turn to a mother when her judgment, which they suspect *may* be fallible at times, is impugned.

The annual Week of Prayer was followed by two more weeks of revival services in late January. An evangelist from Pittsburgh, a spiritual progenitor of Billy Sunday, preached night after night on such subjects as "The Unpardonable Sin," "Where Shall I Spend Eternity—in Heaven or Hell?" and "Is Your Own Soul Safe?"

The first-floor room of the big brick church was packed to the doors. People came in sleds from far back in the country. While most of the audience was made up of sober, God-fearing folk, there was present a fair sprinkling of "unsaved" (from the evangelist's point of view)—enough at least to lend the tremulous emotional content to the close of each service when over the bowed

heads of the congregation the evangelist ran the tonic gamut as he thundered and whispered and besought.

"Is there a soul present that wants to lead a better life? Give us the signal! Raise your hand! Let us pray for you! Who will be the first to confess his sin and take the necessary step towards conversion? One hand is raised! God bless you, brother! Our prayers are with you. Who will be the next? Don't delay! Who knows, this may be your last chance to repent in this world! To-morrow may find you in—— Another hand is raised! And another! God bless you, sister! Pray. Pray, every one pray that souls may be saved this night! Who will be next? Remember, the devil is trying to hold you back. Don't let him tie your hands! The Spirit and the Bride say *Come*, and let him that heareth say *Come*. . . . Another hand is raised! God bless you! And another. . . . Now, while our hearts are touched and the Spirit is working in our midst, let us all sing one verse of 'Just As I Am.' Keep your heads bowed. And as we sing, if there is another soul ready to say, 'Here I come, Lord, full of sin and fit for nothing but hellfire unless You take me and wash me in the blood of the Lamb'—if there's such a soul here, just raise your right hand as we sing. I'll see it! All ready now. . . . Just a chord, please, from the organ. . . . Softly, now—keep your heads bowed."

*"Just as I am, without one plea  
But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

*"Just as I am, and waiting not  
To rid my soul of one dark blot . . ."*

With an undertone accompaniment to the slow rise

and fall of the song, the evangelist kept on with his exhortation. Then suddenly and dramatically he pronounced the benediction, after asking those who had raised their hands to remain for special prayer following the meeting.

Old Mrs. Woods, walking home from one of the services with Jeannie, expressed herself in her usual individual fashion in regard to the visiting preacher.

"Evangelists always mind me of bumbees," said she. "More noise than meat! But I s'pose it takes all kinds of preachin' to save the world. They can't get far in this public testimony business, though, with New Salem folks that are used to holdin' their whisht about their religious feelings. A Scotchman won't turn his soul wrong side out for anybody."

But while the week's meetings were crowned with no spectacular conversion—such as that of old Mr. Crew, the reputed atheist, or poor old Jim Bosler the drunkard would have been—yet there were signs of "quickenin'," as Dr. Rayburn expressed it. Many of the young people who before had stood on dubious ground in regard to the dancing had now swung back towards the fold of the church.

The shiftless Beams, down to the latest babe in arms, had actually straggled out to the services, and flattered by their sudden elevation to popular interest, were considering church membership; while several young farmers from far back in the country had already "professed their faith" before the Session. So the meetings were put down as a success, and the town, still lying white beneath the long snow, settled back into its winter routine.

Connie was physically wearied when February set in, what with the long cold drive each day and the tedious hours in the schoolroom topped by her duties in the choir each evening during the revival. But with it all

her eyes had never looked brighter, her laughter had never been so ready. For Ian's letters were coming with regularity now, twice each week, with hers going as regularly back.

At first they wrote of generalities, with long and detailed descriptions of their days. But little by little the tone slipped into the intimate, the subjective. They poured out to each other their unfledged dreams, their young opinions, their deepest reactions to the mysteries of life.

As to love (Ian wrote in February), it has always seemed to me illogical to suppose that this, the most natural and important of all man's emotional experiences, should flare up like a rocket for the period of his youth only, and then dwindle into a negligible flicker and go out at last as he gets older. So many people seem to feel this is its inevitable course. Aren't they thinking only biologically of something that should be at least half spiritual?

And Connie, sitting alone in her small room in the evening, her dark braids loosed and hanging over her shoulder, her young bosom warm from her heartbeats, wrote back, after several false starts:

Perhaps love in the course of a lifetime has its seasons just as the year has. Each one beautiful and natural in its own way. There is still vitality under the winter snow, even though to the casual eye it seems to be dead.

So they wrote, out of their youth earnestly, poetically, putting forth tentative thought-fingers with which to touch each other's souls.

There were local incidents between the letters of a different sort. Billy Brown invited her to go to a chicken and waffle supper in Blairsville and escorted her also to an entertainment of the Swiss Bell Ringers in Galloway's



Hall—the long auditorium above the store which from time unreckoned had been the amusement centre of the town. Connie and Jeannie discussed anxiously her acceptance of these invitations.

“I don’t want to seem to give Billy encouragement, for you know I could never—especially not now——” Connie said confusedly.

But Jeannie understood.

“I don’t see how you can refuse just yet. Of course, if Ian *should* come at Easter—— But it’s a long, expensive trip from New York, Connie. I don’t think you should expect him. Meanwhile I would just treat Billy in an open, friendly way.”

But Ian came at Easter. He got off the train one Saturday evening in April carrying a Gladstone bag and a long pasteboard box, and made his way to the old Stone Hotel, where he engaged a room. In half an hour the lower end of town knew of his arrival; but it did not know of his errand until later when he came down from his room looking (as Mrs. McNeil of the hotel reported) “as slick as if the cats had licked him.” He went to the desk and inquired in a low tone if they could direct him to the home of Mrs. James Richards and the Misses McDowell.

“But he might as well have spoke Connie’s name right out,” Mrs. McNeil passed the word, “for he had all the earmarks of a young man goin’ courting, if I’m any judge. He’s a good-looking young fellow with a pleasant way with him. He’s got the airs of a city man without being what you would call stuck up.”

Ever since it was known that Ian was coming, the brick house on Dame Street had been in a state of tremendous excitement. Now it stood, cleaned from top to bottom, every pair of curtains freshly hung, every piece of furniture newly polished, Betsy’s famous “light-cakes” in large pans in the pantry, Liza Jane’s special ginger



cookies in the stone crock. Betsy and Liza Jane in their black cashmeres and white aprons tried to sit still without fidgeting in the sitting-room, while Jeannie in her gray nun's veiling gave last touches to the parlour. As the time passed after the train's whistle there was real nervousness. By eight o'clock Liza Jane was sharply pessimistic!

"Well, it looks like 'young lady's disappointment' to me! I felt all the time he wouldn't come all the length from New York. I s'pose you'll get a letter about Monday saying he missed his train! Haven't I always said you ought to be careful about making up with strangers? Now this is what comes of it!"

"And all our work, getting the house ready," Betsy lamented, with the tears imminent, "and Connie's new dress and hat and everything! And, besides, I was really so *anxious* to see him."

Jeannie came to the rescue.

"Oh, now, give him time. Even if he did eat his dinner on the main-line train, as he said he would, he'd want to freshen up a little when he got to the hotel here. Remember, eight o'clock isn't late for city people."

A slow light rain began to fall. To those waiting, it seemed somehow to mark the boundary between the anticipation of the day and the empty finality of the night. At eight-thirty Connie's eyes looked anxious, and Jeannie was plainly uneasy. As to Liza Jane——

"You might as well put out the lamps in the parlour and the hall. There's certainly nobody coming *this* time of night!"

And then the front door bell rang out—a loud, clear peal.

Connie, wearing her new brown dress which she and Jeannie had bought ready-made in Greensburg, ran through the hall and opened the door, And Ian, tall and eager, came in, with the smell of the spring rain clinging to his topcoat.

He dropped his hat and box on the hall table and then, taking Connie's hand in his own, looked down at her with a kind of wistful wonder.

"I didn't believe I'd ever really get here and find you just the same as I rememberd," he said softly. "Did you believe it yourself?"

Connie shook her head. "No. For the last half-hour I've been sure you didn't come at all, and Aunt Liza's been lecturing me on the danger of taking up with strange young men!"

Then they laughed in the sheer happiness of the moment and shook hands all over again. Connie led him through the parlour into the sitting-room, where he was presented to the family. Liza Jane and Betsy had planned beforehand just how they would act. They would be dignified and quite standoffish at first till they had well sized him up. But Ian upset all their calculations. They hadn't reckoned on his unconscious charm. In a few minutes they were all talking together while Ian poked the coals in the grate.

"You don't mind if I do this, do you?" he kept asking boyishly. "I haven't had a poker in my hand since I came to this country."

He looked around the sitting-room. "This makes me think of our old house when I was a boy. And my grandmother always wore a white apron, just like yours," he added, turning to the aunts with a smile.

Even Liza Jane relaxed after that. And Jeannie, with her quick and infallible instinct for character, took him to her heart immediately.

Later on, when he and Connie were alone in the parlour, he remembered the box in the hall.

"Oh, I brought you some posies for Easter," he said. "I hope they're not done for, after their trip."

When Connie opened the box, she found red roses, masses of them with long stems and shining leaves. Her

delight was so great that Ian, looking down at her, was strangely touched.

"You really like them so much?" he asked gently.

"Oh, I can't *tell* you how! You see," Connie confessed innocently, "I've never had flowers given me before."

"Selfish of me, I know, but somehow I'm glad of it!" Ian returned.

He was in town, he told her, for ten days, if that was agreeable to her. He had vacation that long, and chose to spend it in New Salem. Connie unfortunately would have to teach as usual, but they would have the evenings together and the following week-end. For the days he had brought some books along, and would get some extra studying done.

Ian roamed about the parlour, touching this thing and that.

"I've tried so often to picture your home, Connie, but I never dreamed there would be so much in it that would remind me of my childhood. Take this, for instance."

He stopped before the mantelpiece. Above it hung a huge illustrated copy of the Lord's Prayer.

"We had one of those," he said. "And flowers made out of hair under glass, almost identical to that," he went on, indicating the other wall, "and a haircloth sofa and an old-fashioned grand piano like yours, and a whatnot. . . . Doesn't it seem strange and rather——"

"It is a coincidence," Connie hastened to add.

Then they sat down together on the sofa and began where the last letter had left off.

But, even while he looked at her, his eyes warm with feeling, Connie knew that with him she need never be upon her guard.

Before Betsy and Liza Jane slept that night Betsy said hesitantly, as though the remark bordered upon sacrilege,

"There's something about him that reminds me—just a little, of course—but the height of him and the way he laughs—he seemed to me a little like—*James*."

"Yes," said Liza Jane. "He may be just a thought like him."

No higher tribute could have been offered the stranger.

It was an amazingly happy week for all of them. By Monday noon Ian had the idea of walking out into the country to meet Connie as she drove back. He stopped at the house to consult Jeannie, who at once approved the plan.

"It's only three miles, and if you're fond of walking—just go straight out the Pike. You can't miss her. And then, of course, you'll come here for supper. We'll have it ready when you get back."

So Ian arrived each afternoon at the little schoolhouse in time to bring Connie home. They drove slowly back through the pleasant spring weather, past the young green of the wheat fields, and the first cherry blossoms in the orchards, with the far background of the Blue Ridge like an azure dream behind them.

They would come laughing up the garden walk then from the stable (where Connie taught him the difference between a bridle and a crupper), up the back steps.

"Good land, if she isn't bringing him in through the kitchen!" Betsy had exclaimed the first time.

"Let her," Jeannie said, smiling. "Maybe a homely kitchen seems good to him after the city."

As a matter of fact, they quickly gave up treating Ian with any degree of formality. He was at once quite unaffectedly at home in any part of the house. He brought big lumps of coal from the cellar for the grate fire; he ran upstairs for Jeannie's glasses, experimenting on the way down with the broad bannister as a means of transportation, to Connie's infinite amusement; he pumped the water at the pantry sink cold enough to suit Liza

Jane's capricious palate; he dropped down at the square piano (which James had bought secondhand for Jeannie's tenth wedding anniversary), and with a few chords to accompany him sang old songs, which Sarah McDowell had learned from the lips of her Scotch mother. They echoed through the rooms like old friends:

*"Do ye ken John Peel,  
With his coat so gay?"*

Or perhaps it would be "Hunting-Tower," or "The Crookit Bawbee," or "When the Kye Come Hame."

And once in the dusk before the parlour lamp was lighted, Jeannie heard him singing softly with a note in his voice that went to her heart:

*"Aye wakin', oh! Wakin' aye an' eerie,  
Sleep I canna get for thinkin' o' my dearie!  
Aye wakin', oh!  
Spring's a pleasant time,  
Flowers o' every colour;  
The water aye rins o'er the heugh;  
An' I long for my lover!  
Aye wakin', oh!"*

Jeannie and Ian had taken to each other rapturously from the beginning. They were congenial in a dozen small ways. They both shared a childish love of riddles, and Ian was constantly bringing one up from his memory to please her.

"Oh, here's a good one, Mrs. Richards: 'Why are mice like turnips?'"

Jeannie would twist a curl and ponder delightedly.

"Why are mice like—— Why are mice—— Oh, tell me. I give up!"

"Because the cat'll eat them!"

After Jeannie's first laughter she always explained patiently to Betsy, who could never see a joke unaided.

"You see the *cat'll* eat mice and the *cattle* eat turnips!"

There was always laughter that week and a robust stir through the rooms. As Terese put it, after being there one night at supper, "You wouldn't think one more person in the house could make such a difference."

But when Ian and Connie were at last alone each evening in the parlour, where the red roses bloomed on the marble-topped centre table, their voices sank to a low note. They grew serious then (as people moved by a great happiness often do), speaking of life and love and religion and even of death. They looked into each other's eyes as they talked, deep calling unto deep. And when the old clock slowly struck twelve it seemed impossible that another evening should have flown so soon.

Jeannie had quietly dispatched a note to David early in the week to ask him if he could come out the next Saturday. She had a double point in this. She felt that David was Connie's greatest asset as far as family went. She wanted Ian to be impressed with him. But still more she wanted David to see Ian and confirm her own opinion of the young man. From either viewpoint the meeting of Ian and the Judge would be somewhat in the nature of a triumph.

David came Saturday in time for supper, driving out from Greensburg as he usually did. The two men shook hands, their eyes on a level.

"Well, they seem to have used the same yardstick in making us," David greeted him whimsically.

"I'd be proud to think so, sir," Ian answered.

They sat in the parlour together while the women laid the table for supper. Connie used some of her roses as a centre-piece, and altogether the meal took on the grace of a feast. Jeannie presided, her eyes twinkling, guiding the conversation with her own quick wit, asking David



and Ian leading questions, pleased that each seemed to be at his best. There was good talk in the little sitting-room that night, where they all sat till eleven. Then Ian rose to go, and David rose also.

"I'll walk down to the hotel with you," he said. "I want to stretch my legs."

It was nearly one o'clock when he returned, but Jeannie, waiting up for once, found he had not been with Terese. He and Ian had been finishing their talk in the hotel room.

"Well," said Jeannie anxiously, "what do you think of him?"

"I think he's a remarkably fine fellow."

"Oh, David, I hoped you'd like him."

"I do—unqualifiedly."

"Then everything's perfect. Do you know, Davy, it's almost too wonderful! Just when we were worried about Connie's future, here she meets Ian by the merest accident, who seems to be everything we could have wished! And they're both in love, don't you think so?"

"Plain as a pikestaff."

"I suppose I'm foolish, but I declare I'm almost afraid of events that seem set like a stage."

"Too perfect situations?"

"Yes. Do you ever feel that way?"

"Sometimes. It's the trail of the old Puritan over us. We assume that the only natural course of events is the wrath of God and the miseries of this life. We're afraid to believe that the Creator might sometimes actually wish us well!"

"I suppose so. It's like the old hymn Father used to quote:

*"We should expect some danger nigh,  
When most we feel delight."*

"Exactly. Ghastly theology. Thank God we've gotten away from it a little. As for young Donaldson, though, there's only one thing I'm worried about."

"There! I knew there was a 'but' in your mind, David. Tell me!"

"Well, he's an unusually logical thinker, and, so far, he's intellectually honest. And those two qualities, as I see it, don't exactly make for ease and comfort in the ministry."

"Why, Davy! What do you mean? What better qualities could he have?"

David never could endure the sight of anxious lines on Jeannie's face. He back-tracked hastily.

"I only meant," he said, "that I think perhaps he might have been wiser to choose the law as a career."

Jeannie laughed, relieved.

"Oh, you and your law! You can't think of any other profession. I was afraid you meant something wrong with his character."

"No, no! He strikes me as being as fine as they come, along that line."

"Then my mind's at rest. For, of course, I'd rather see him a minister than anything. And I'll try not to be a Puritan in my satisfaction over the whole affair. True love does run smooth sometimes!"

Then, at sight of his face, she caught her breath.

"Davy, I'm sorry."

Her eyes were rueful, but he patted her shoulder and said:

"That's all right. As for Connie and her young man, I think everything looks rosy enough."

Later, as the Judge was ready to climb into the low-poster in the big spare room, he heard a tap at his door. It was Jeannie standing there in her bare feet (she never could remember to wait for slippers) with a pink blanket caught hastily round her shoulders over her nightgown.

"Davy, here's a good one. And I won't tell you the answer till morning, mind! *Why are mice like turnips?*"

As David turned, smiling, back to bed, he was thinking that, while joy and sorrow might ebb and flow, Jeannie would always be Jeannie!

The house seemed quiet after Ian left, but Connie's eyes still told their happy tale. Letters flew back and forth faster than ever, and plans for the summer soon were under way. Ian had promised to spend June and part of July in the woods with his uncle, whose health was precarious; but August would be his own. If Connie was willing, he would spend the month at the old Stone Hotel in New Salem, and they could see each other every day. Connie, trying to couch her reply in a modest maidenly reserve, still made it clear that she found the plan perfect.

As April turned to May, all schools closed, and Connie wrote "Finis" temporarily across the Pike. The village gardens were sweet with blooming apple trees and the rich smell of freshly-spaded earth. Women in the season's first sunbonnets planted their onion sets, to the accompaniment of "Gee. . . . Whoa. . . . Haw," coming regularly from the vacant lots which were being ploughed for potatoes. Thousands of tacks were withdrawn laboriously from the edges of large heavy Brussels carpets and lighter chain-rag strips, and long lace window curtains were starched and stretched on prickly frames in the sunshine. New Salem took on no outside consideration until house cleaning and garden making were decently past, and June with its white clover and roses had taken radiant possession of the countryside.

Then, on a day when the whole world was clothed upon with beauty, the news was brought to town. Jennie Henderson was dead of some quick malady which Dr. Foster could not name—a desperate infection against which her frail body had put up no resistance. And as

the word passed from lip to lip sobered women left their work and by twos and threes gathered together to sound with hushed voices the final tragic note. It was old Mrs. Woods who told it in the brick house on Dame Street, her face working.

"And they say she was conscious up to the very last, and she knew she was going and was fair terror-stricken. And she kept calling, 'Mother, will I be lost? Mother, *will I be lost!*'"

No one could speak in the McDowell kitchen. Then Jeannie rose from her chair.

"I must go to them at once. Oh, I wish I'd only known to go sooner! Hitch up the horse for me, Connie. I'll go along."

"But, Jeannie, it'll be contagious, mebbe, this disease, whatever it is," Betsy put in tremulously.

"I must go, anyway. They're old neighbours and in trouble. You know Mother never would have stopped for any danger."

For a moment they all saw Sarah preparing her bundle of home remedies, ready to ride through a winter storm to sit up all night with a sick neighbour. Duty had an unequivocal meaning for her. It still had for her children. Liza Jane went to the pantry and hastily wrapped up a panful of fresh light-cakes.

"Take these along," she said, her voice breaking. "They'll have small heart for baking to-day, and these may come in handy."

When Jeannie reached the Henderson farmhouse, she was unprepared for the desolation that met her. John Henderson himself acted crazed.

"Her blood's on them, and may it stay on them," he shouted, shaking his great fist. "On Dr. Rayburn and the rest of his Pharisees! She's never been the same since that church business. Never took to her food right, an' she'd walk off by herself an' start up in her sleep at

night. Never well, mind you, since they kept her out of the church——”

And then he broke down, his shoulders shaking, his face in his hands.

“Oh, I wish to God I hadn’t said anything to her when she went that day to join. I lay heavy on her, you know, to make no promises, just thinkin’ she’d only be shuttin’ herself out of the fun she’d a right to! And now look where she is. . . .”

It was a sad day. Matilda and Billy Brown and young Billy were there, and other of the country neighbours came. But they brought no comfort. The customary phrases spoken in the presence of death, such as, “Well, it’s all for the best,” or “Well, she’s at rest now,” seemed to stick in their throats. They all took one look at Jennie’s strained white face, and fear still stared at them through the closed eyelids.

Jen Henderson, her mother, sat hunched in a chair in the kitchen, refusing to touch food.

“Oh, if we’d only sent for a preacher yesterday, he might have give her some comfort. But John wouldn’t have Dr. Rayburn in the house, an’ the new man at Confluence we’ve never even seen yet, an’ it seemed odd to send for the U.P. or the Covenanter preacher when we don’t belong there—an’ we never thought the end was so near. . . . But none of us had any words to answer her. . . . A preacher might have known what to say. . . . God help us, she hadn’t even a prayer over her, she went so quick!”

Jeannie talked gently to her, calling up from her remembrance long past words that James her husband had spoken to stricken hearts. She held Jen’s hands tightly in her own, while their tears fell together. She followed Huldah, poor girl, to the back porch and put her arms about her, letting her sob away her first grief upon her shoulder. When she left in the late afternoon she was

exhausted, but she knew that something of her own inner strength had been left with them.

She turned Nell's head to the left at the top of the hill, and, following an impulse, drove home the longest way round past the old farm. At the foot of the lane she stopped and rested her eyes upon the familiar scene. There stood the house, still square and firm upon its hill, with the orchard behind it. There stood the sugar meadow where James had saved her from the fire. There were the rolling fields which Daniel her father had sown and reaped. All the same, except that where the Whitehorn used to pour its clear waters under the bridge in the lane and through the pasture, a sickly streak of yellowish red showed now.

Her eyes rested at last upon the lane itself. It had a meaning more distinct in her memory, more poignant in its association than anything else about the farm. Through the lane had flowed her deepest joys and sorrows. She had waited here, weeping her young tears, when David left for Eldersridge. She had watched James coming up the lane for the first time with her father, his trunk behind them in the light spring wagon. . . . She had waved him gaily off down the lane the day of the barn raising; she had seen him borne back through it, dead. Above the keening of the March wind in the night of her travail, she had heard the rattle of the buggy coming up the lane bringing the doctor and life to the child in her womb.

It looked back at her now with a vague desolation, this little strip of earth saturated with the deep experiences of her life. It seemed narrower than formerly, and more stony. A plank in the flat bridge over the Whitethorn was loose and raised above the others.

"Father never would have allowed a day to pass over *that*," Jeannie thought.

And then with a rush of pain the changes of the years



beat down upon her heart. Birth and the sorrows of life and death. So ran the round of it. And the places that knew them, knowing them no more.

She sat, the reins slack in her hands, her face fallen in lines of unaccustomed depression.

Then slowly the familiar light of her spirit crept back upon her features. The coal. *The coal*. For the moment she had forgotten it. It was there, lying close to the bosom of the old farm, waiting to give them of its bounty. David had written that the Bill of Complaint had been filed. In spite of his doubts of the outcome, a sureness welled up in Jeannie's heart. There would be comforts yet. She would see Stratford and London and Venice! She and Connie together, one perfect trip before Connie married, perhaps. After that anything might come, even death. She would have had her great desire.

She looked off across the fields, smiling. They did not know the gift they were about to give her.

The summer weeks moved quickly. To Connie's intense relief Billy Brown had not come near the house since Ian's visit at Easter. She hoped that his ardour would die out quickly. Sometimes, however, as she saw his eyes fixed on her during Sunday night service, she wondered. It was not like Billy to relinquish easily. But she would postpone that worry until it had to be considered. Just now the prospect of Ian's return crowded out everything else.

He would find the whole town much more sightly than it had been in the early spring. The great maple trees bordering Main Street met now across the thoroughfare. All the crude outlines of stables and outbuildings in the village backyards were softened by foliage. The town drowsed in a deep content while locusts and tree toads trolled and strummed in the trees.

The McDowell property itself was a pleasant place in

summer. The side yard with its wide border beds were bright with flowers; the back porch, shaded by the heavy grapevine, had the old dough-tray still, to hold the New York *Tribune* and the Pittsburgh *Gazette*, and stout rocking-chairs upon which to rest. While in the back lot was Liza Jane's fruitful garden and the shade of two large apple trees.

Ian came on the evening of the first day of August. The aunts, watching the west window, saw him first. But they all kept to the sitting-room while Connie ran to the front hall to meet him. It was soft summer twilight, with the odour of petunias and musk in the air. Connie stood with the light of the lamp behind her. She wore a little flowered lawn dress that Jeannie and Terese had made together. It revealed what her winter dresses did not—the bare throat and arms, the warm, fragile loveliness of her body. There were fluttering tendrils of her dark hair loosed now, and the colour in her cheeks was richer from the sun.

Ian caught her hands and held them for a moment against his breast.

"Connie!"

"Ian!"

And then, as though frightened at what their unguarded eyes had spoken, they hurried to be casual.

He had brought little gifts for all of them—candy for the aunts, a cobweb handkerchief for Jeannie, books for Connie. In a day's time the house was again filled with the invigorating quality of his personality.

Betsy openly adored him. Liza Jane, while adjuring the rest sternly in secret to remember he was practically a stranger, was still in truth his slave. And Jeannie yearned over him with a double affection.

"Listen, everybody. This is serious and very important to me as a theological student. I want your help, all of you," he announced one morning as he came up on

the back porch. "*What did Adam and Eve do when they left the Garden of Eden?*"

"Well," Betsy began earnestly, "they had to till the ground then."

"Yes," Liza Jane added briskly. "The Lord told them, 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.'"

"It's a riddle!" Jeannie cried triumphantly. "Look, he's laughing! Oh, this sounds like a good one. Tell us, Ian. What's the answer?"

"They raised Cain!"

Liza Jane tried feebly to suggest sacrilege, but finally gave up and joined in the general laughter.

"I declare he could wind anybody round his finger, that one," she muttered to herself. "He's got such a way with him!"

Connie was both shy and proud to have the town know of her lover, but whether she would or not, the town was soon aware. Ian was not the sort of person it was easy to conceal.

Before the first week was over he had without the slightest apparent effort made friends with most of the populace. He had paid his respects to Dr. Rayburn; he lingered in the post office to talk politics with Mr. Drum, the postmaster; he was at home in the barber shop; he had spoken to old Mr. Davy, the town's near centenarian, had tied Mrs. Selby's horse for her at the hitching-post, and had a pleasant bowing acquaintance with all the ladies of Main Street who sat to rest and fan themselves on their front porches at about the hours the handsome stranger passed up and down. While Mrs. McNeil at the hotel set the final seal of approval upon him.

"A gentleman, every inch of him," she pronounced, "but nice and common as anybody."

Through the long sunny afternoons Ian and Constance left the town far behind them. Sometimes with old Nell

and sometimes with a livery rig, they drove over the country, stopping where a quiet wood presented itself or a far view of the mountains. They read, sitting close on a carpet of moss or a sweet-scented harvest field:

*"Escape me?*

*Never—*

*Beloved!*

*While I am I, and you are you . . ."*

They read:

*"But do not let us quarrel any more,*

*No, my Lucrezia; bear with me for once;*

*Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.*

*You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?"*

They read "Maud" and "The Blessed Damozel" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd."

But even as they trembled at the beauty of the words and the magic of their own nearness, Ian never laid his hands upon her.

Some afternoons they only sauntered through the shady garden and the small iron gate at the end of it, then wandered along the creek bank until they found, a little way down, a level spot at the foot of a great oak. They sat there until the shadows grew long. As Connie was to remember it later, these afternoons were the most precious. For by one of those subtle habits which grow up in lovers' days, they never read here. They talked. And there were never hours enough for all they needs must say.

One day Ian spoke slowly.

"About the Bible, now, Connie: you believe it's word for word inspired?"

"Why, of course! Don't you?"

"I always have. I've been reading about Bishop Colenso, though. Ever hear of him?"

"Never. Such a queer name."

"Yes. He was an Episcopal Bishop—a missionary out in Natal, Africa. He was translating the Old Testament into Zulu, with a native chief helping him. When they got to the part where the children of Israel and all their cattle were travelling round the in Wilderness the old chief scratched his head and said: 'There's something wrong about these numbers. This many people with their cattle couldn't live like this.' And he proved it. So it set the Bishop thinking."

Ian was skipping stones in the water. Connie's face was unclouded, watching his strong, shapely hands.

"When he made his conclusions known back in England, they tried him for heresy and deposed him. 1874, it was—just thirty years ago!"

"How dreadful!"

"They had a limerick about it then—printed in *Punch*, I think. . . . I came across it while I was reading the story:

*"There was a Bishop of Natal,  
Who had a Zulu for a pal.  
Said the Zulu, 'Look here,  
Ain't the Pentateuch queer?'  
And converted my lord of Natal."*

"Oh, that's funny!" Connie chuckled. "You must remember to tell that to Mother. She loves jingles."

Ian gave her one straight look from his intent gray eyes. She was smiling and looking off to the meadows beyond the stream. He watched her for a moment, then turned back to skipping stones. He did not mention the Bishop of Natal again.

The weeks moved swiftly towards September. Joy makes no delaying. But the time was long enough for

Ian to share all that made up Connie's life. The serene homely round of the days, the quiet of the evenings broken only by the crickets and the buggy wheels on Main Street, with sometimes the distant rise and fall of men's voices on the night air. A strange exotic sound meant for the Volga or the Danube, but borne now by some curious chance across the Loyalhanna. It was the "hunkies" singing at Mike Gafferty's.

During Ian's stay old Mr. Davy died full of years, with the whole town attending his funeral; and one of the poor shiftless Beam girls had a baby, at fifteen. Jeannie, who had always taken an interest in the family as she did in all the needy of the town, was called hastily one evening to go to help in the emergency. Ian could not fail to overhear the conversation, though the matter was not mentioned in his presence.

Terese, with her strange, dark eyes and captivating smile, and old Mrs. Woods, with her pungent comments on life, came and went as usual at the McDowell's, both heartily approving of Ian. And Sunday by Sunday passed with the clear morning peal of the church bells and the echoing sound of the last hymn melting away into the stillness of the night.

One Saturday evening while Connie was at choir practice Ian talked to Jeannie frankly of himself and his prospects.

"I have a small independent income," he said, "which I inherited from my grandmother; so I've not been a financial burden to my uncle. And it will be a help while I'm making a place for myself in the ministry. I'll graduate next May, if all goes well, and I hope by then I'll have a definite charge. . . ."

But he did not tell her outright of his love. Indeed, there was but one subject upon which it seemed difficult for Ian to speak. That was Connie herself. He teased Betsy, to her tremulous delight; he joked occasionally



with Liza Jane and constantly with Jeannie; but, while he and Connie laughed much together, he neither joked with her nor teased her. And Jeannie loved him for his diffidence. Sometimes as she watched their eyes meeting across the room she was conscious of a hush, as though Time itself stood still, waiting upon their love's convenience.

David came out for a week-end, and he and Ian had a long cross-country walk. They were both quiet when they returned, though to Jeannie's questions later David only reaffirmed his admiration for the young man. He stated, too, that he would keep his eye open for any church vacancies around Pittsburgh during the coming year.

The last day came. Ian was to be driven to Greensburg for the ten o'clock train east that night. He and Connie both had been restless during the day. Their laughter had a high-pitched note of nervousness within it. They found themselves at last in the parlour, with only an hour more together. And a silence fell upon them.

Ian was standing, his hands in his pockets, before the mantelpiece, staring abstractedly at the illustrated copy of the Lord's Prayer that hung there. At last he spoke without turning.

"Well, Connie, it's summer's end, I guess—and good-bye just now. I wonder if it's as hard for you to say it as it is for me!"

Constance had moved towards the west window, where the last faint streak of sunset showed above the dusk. She stood, peering out, waiting for pride or self-control to come to her rescue and stop the disgraceful mist in her eyes.

Suddenly he turned swiftly, came over to her and took her in his arms. Connie looked up to his face. It was set in a gravity which she had never seen there before. He bent his head quickly and kissed her, once and again and again. Connie felt his lips warm and hard upon

hers. She felt herself pressed close to his strong body. She knew then that all the summer had been leading up to this. Heart beating against heart. Ecstasy of surrender, each to each.

He would come as frequently as he could during the winter; but it could not be very often, they both knew. They would write constantly, but letters now seemed a poor substitute for the heaven of this embrace.

He tore himself away at last, and Connie stood trembling in the hall after she had closed the door. The house already seemed to cry out for loneliness.

All at once there was the sound of running feet, a leap up on the porch, a knock at the door. Connie opened it breathlessly. Ian stood there, looming tall from the darkness.

"It's purely superfluous, but I forgot to ask you if you'll marry me!"

They clung together, laughing, for one sweet moment, and then he really was gone.

## CHAPTER FIVE

THE SEPTEMBER SUN HAD NEVER BEEN SO MELLOW, NOR October so rich in scarlet and gold. A sensible peace hung over the old town. The year had spent itself in growth. It would rest now like an old man in a chimney corner, waiting for the winter winds.

Along with the sweet nostalgic fragrance of smoke from the burning leaves, other odours, homely but pleasant, were borne on the air: the incense from many kitchens where canning and preserving and pickling were carried on; warm, pungent, comfortable essences distilled from the last fruits of the garden. Women in large clean gingham aprons cooked the tomatoes and onions which their own hands had planted in the spring-time, and tended through the summer. They bottled and sealed this final consummation of the season's toil, added it to the long rows of canned fruits and crocks of apple butter on their cellar shelves, and found life wholesome and good.

In the McDowell house the days, of course, were sharpened needle-fine in interest, for Connie was going to be married. Ian had written to Jeannie, finding it easier to express himself so, and Jeannie had answered him as though he were already a son. He would bring the ring at Christmas time, and then, if Constance was willing, he would like to be married in June, so that they could go together straight to their new home in the manse, wherever it turned out to be.

Jeannie resolutely fought down the insufferable thought of the coming separation. Time enough to endure that later. Now she would enjoy the reflection of Connie's happiness and the thrill of a whole winter

given over to preparation. Moreover, the business of the coal was taking form. Mr. Harrington reported progress. The case was on the trial list for that month. It would be a fight, but there was a hope of victory. David was coming out soon, and would give her the whole outline of Harrington's argument. They should have a decision before many months. Jeannie's pulse quickened at the thought. They could still take the trip abroad together even after Connie was married. She would speak to Ian about it. But if that failed Jeannie knew she would go alone; the desire in her soul was as strong as that.

Liza Jane and Betsy had met the news of Connie's love with an outwardly calm practicality. There must be quilts and comfortables made, and it was none too soon to be at them, either! Liza Jane started in on a Log Cabin pattern and Betsy on the Wedding Ring. They also shook from their camphor balls, and hung out to air, the famous Rag-wheel of Destruction and the Sunburst that years ago they had laid shamefacedly upon the bed prepared for James. These would go with the bride.

At nights, alone in their room, they talked with a virginal delicacy upon all the phases of the coming marriage. They discussed Ian from every angle, and yet could find no flaw in him.

"If they just settle somewhere within reach, and get along well, both of them, with their congregation, we'll certainly have cause for thankfulness," Liza Jane always ended.

Terese was deeply moved by the secret told to her as one of the family. She relived her own thwarted youth in this new and apparently perfect romance. Each week she brought over a fine linen towel or a rare old bedspread or a tablecloth to be added to Connie's chest of treasures, and she told Jeannie privately that she wanted to help with the trousseau when the time came.

Connie herself went her way in a daze of happiness. She woke sometimes in the mornings wonderingly, terrified for fear she had only dreamed the joy. Then from under her pillow she would draw the last letter in Ian's dear handwriting:

. . . Isn't it strange! We two pale little smouldering sparks struck off once from the Great Entity, now suddenly caught up together in flaming love that seems to give new meaning to the whole universe! I wonder if you dream how much I love you!

It was all true. They belonged forever to each other—she and Ian. In the evenings, sitting by the window in her own room, she wrote her replies.

BELOVED:

At last everything is quiet. All the lights on the street are out but mine. There is a faint moonlight on the garden, and my own star, Antares, the little ruddy one in the south that I love, is twinkling at me over the maple-tree.

I've waited all day for this time: when there would be no interruptions, no calls upon the busy outward *me* who is everybody's; when I could sit here imagining you are beside me, my heart speaking to yours; when we could be quite alone, we two, with the darkness and the stars. Oh, Ian, the wonder is always with me that anything so perfect as our love should be in all the world. . . .

So they wrote out of their rapturous young hearts, and the weeks moved swiftly on. Too swiftly, Jeannie felt. Often at night, lying wakeful, she felt Time rushing past her like a wind—as though it were hurrying them on to some near and yet ultimate destination. A cold fear seized upon her at such times. It was not her nature to forbode evil, and yet her heart in the night watches refused to rest. It was the uncertainty about the coal

case, of course. Or perhaps it was the memory of little Jennie Henderson; or maybe it was only that she was living again her courtship days with James, and feeling the stark loneliness for him overcome her. It must be one of these or all of them that lay heavily upon her as she turned and turned upon her bed.

In the mornings, however, her usual cheerfulness returned, and she was full of eager hopes and plans.

When David came out, they sat around the grate fire while he tried to bring the heavy technicalities of the coal case within their grasp.

"It's like this," he said. "The water from a coal mine does pollute any stream into which it empties. Every one knows this, and admits that it presents a serious problem in any countryside where the coal industry is being developed. Now, then. The situation has been brought into court before, but the decision has been to this effect."

"No big law words, now, Davy. I want to understand this," Jeannie interrupted.

"All right, I'll be quite simple. In the other test case that came up, the water from the mine flowed naturally by gravity down to the stream where it emptied. It polluted a pure stream, of course, but it was allowed to be necessary, because it followed a natural means of exit from the mine. Later when the water from a lower level of the mine was pumped up and discharged into this stream it was still held lawful because the stream was already polluted."

"I guess I understand that."

"All right. Now, the difference in our case is this—which Harrington was keen enough to see: The water which they are pumping up from the mine to discharge into the Whitethorn is coming from a level below the stream, don't you see? And the stream was unpolluted before. Therefore the other case can't apply. In other



words, the mine water is being unnaturally and against gravity forced into a clear stream. Now, that's the whole story in a nutshell, though poor Harrington's been digging for months to get it formulated. What the court will decide is on the lap of the gods."

"And of course the coal company will fight hard."

"Naturally. But we have a chance. And the best thing now is to forget about it until we see what happens. Anyway, there's enough to keep your minds busy this winter without thinking of the coal, isn't there, Connie? When's the young man coming out again?"

"Christmas, we hope. He expects to be here a week."

"And he's bringing something with him," Jeannie put in slyly.

"Now, Mother! But of course I don't mind Uncle David's knowing. He's getting it at Tiffany's, too. He says if I don't like it, it can be changed. But I'm sure to like it!"

"Of course. He's a fine fellow, Connie. I couldn't have picked you a better one myself. . . . Well, I believe I'll go out for a breath of air, and see how the old town looks by moonlight. Leave the back door unlocked, will you?"

But at Christmas Ian's week was cut down to three days, for he had had an urgent request to preach as a candidate at the town of Marsdon in the northern part of the state. He reached New Salem at last on Christmas Eve, full of a tremendous excitement. They had liked him! They had asked him to come back one more Sunday in February. But they had seemed almost decided then to give him a call. And especially when they heard he was to be married in June!

He told Connie all the news at once after the first long delight of their embrace. There was the most charming old white manse set amongst big maple trees—a dream of a place! Just such a home as he longed to take her

to. And the church was really imposing for a small town. Fine people they seemed, too. Very conservative, but so likeable. It looked like a sure thing!

Then from his inner pocket near his heart he slowly drew the little box and laid it in Connie's hand. She opened it, gasped, then wept a little as he put the ring on her finger. It was so beautiful! The diamond so much larger and brighter than she had dreamed it would be. Now at last everybody could know that she was engaged to Ian!

The three days passed like a breath. There was a hilarious happiness in the brick house. Ian's high spirits carried everything before him. A gale of laughter swept through the rooms by day. Then in the evenings, in secret and delicious contrast, he and Connie sat in the parlour, talking in low voices, a new and daring intimacy overtaking them as they spoke of the white manse at Marsden and how it would feel to be living there—together.

After he had gone, Connie found herself caught up in a wave of town excitement. Now that the news of her engagement was public property, the village roused to its new interest. There was a noticeable element of pride in the conversation. One of New Salem's girls marrying a handsome young minister, fresh from New York! And such a ring! A steady stream of callers arrived at the brick house to wish her well, get all the details straight, and see the diamond.

The whole social life of the next few months was to be centred about Connie's marriage. Showers of every description were planned, and the Woman's Missionary Society, of which Jeannie had for many years been president, voted to make the bride a quilt, since she was the first girl in many years to go out from the church to be mistress of a manse. Jeannie was profoundly touched by this signal evidence of respect for her and her daughter.

One night a few weeks after Ian's visit the front door bell rang sharply. When Connie went to answer, she found Billy Brown. Her cheeks were scarlet as she asked him to come in. Through the joy of the last months the question of Billy had arisen sometimes troublingly. But she had assumed that he considered all finished between them and felt relief at the thought. Now, here he was, his eyes burning into hers as they had done before.

"Won't—you sit down, Billy?"

"Listen, Connie. What's all this I hear about you having a diamond? Say, I thought I'd better get round here and straighten things out." He spoke with a nervous rough bravado.

"There's nothing to straighten, Billy. I'm engaged to Mr. Donaldson. . . . You may have seen him——"

Billy had not sat down. He was breathing heavily. He came closer.

"You're crazy, Connie! You don't know what you're doing! It's my fault for bein' so pig-headed. I don't mind telling you how it all was. You see, when this fellow came last Easter and then again in the summer, I just thought I'd show you you couldn't make a fool out of me. Do you see? I just kept away these last months to teach you a lesson. Well, I went too far. I see it now, all right."

Connie was crushing a desire to laugh, but Billy's eyes were tragic enough.

"You know how I feel about you, Connie. I want to settle down, and you're the only girl I ever wanted to marry. I as good as told you that before, didn't I? Sittin' right over on that sofa there, didn't I?"

"Well, you said you——"

"You know what I meant. You knew it then. I said I wanted to go steady with you. Well, I meant it all right. Now listen, Connie, don't think anything about how I acted this summer. I'll do anything you say now.

You can explain to this preacher fellow how it all was."

"But, Billy——"

"Put the blame on me. My shoulders are broad. Tell him how we were goin' together—how our families are old friends an' all. Tell him anything; only, Connie, you've got to give me a chance again!"

Connie's face was suddenly tender. She spoke gently as though to a child.

"Billy, you don't understand. I love Mr. Donaldson."

Billy made no move for a long second.

"You mean you'd honestly rather have him than me?"

"I love him, and I expect to marry him."

"When?"

"Next June."

Billy half turned to the door and then came back.

"We ain't a bragging family, Connie, but I'm goin' to say this: I've got money, Connie. More than you think. I could get you pretty near anything you wanted. I'll get you a diamond twice as big as that one. I'll build you a new house, and you can pick all the furniture. . . . You can have hired girls. You needn't do a stroke of work. By God, I'll be good to you, Connie, if you'll marry me!"

"Billy, please! The money wouldn't matter. Nothing else matters when you love. Oh, I'm so terribly sorry! I don't know what to say!"

"So it's to be next June!" Billy's voice was harsh.

"Yes."

"All right. But I'm not givin' you up, mind, till you're married. And there's no pride in me any more. Not about you, that is. If anything goes wrong with your plans—you can't know him so *awful* well in a year—I'll marry you if the whole town knows I'm second fiddle. You see"—Billy turned his hat round and round on his hand—"I know a little about love, myself."

Then he turned and went swiftly out, without waiting for her to speak.

Connie was considerably shaken by the strange interview. Billy's last speech touched her deeply. Poor Billy, feeling so invincible with his money and his security—trying to punish her by his apparent indifference, sure she would eventually come back to him! It was cruel that, out of all the girls in the countryside that would have jumped at the chance of marrying Billy, he could not have chosen one for his love, instead of her.

She wrote a little of her distress over the whole affair to Ian and had him write back: "Poor devil! I guess I feel sorrier for him than you do, for I know what it's like to love you, Connie."

On a blustery February day, Liza Jane, sitting by the west window in the sitting-room, called suddenly to Jeannie to bring her a drink of water. Jeannie, struck by a strange quality in her voice, ran to fill the tin cup from which Liza Jane always insisted the water tasted cooler. She rushed with it to her sister's side, and then felt a fear stab her as Liza Jane with an eerie gesture turned the tin cup slowly upside down, pouring the water out upon the carpet.

They got her somehow to the lounge, and leaving Betsy beside her, Jeannie caught up a shawl and ran, her own heart protesting at the violence of the stress, down the street and through the alley to the doctor's.

It was a stroke, he said when he came. Though Jeannie had known it already. When they spoke of bringing a bed down at once to the parlour, Dr. Foster shook his head.

"I don't think it will be necessary," he said quietly.

The afternoon was bleak with a cutting wind and sleet that beat and rattled at the windows. It was as though Liza Jane's strong spirit that had asked no quarter from life must still do battle with one more storm before it was released.

When the clock was striking ten that night, the heavy breathing stopped. Terese was with them then, and old Mrs. Woods. By common consent they all turned to support Betsy, who crouched, sobbing, her eyes riveted upon Liza Jane's face. They helped her up to bed. All strength of limb seemed to have departed from her.

"I'll stay and—sleep with you, Betsy," Terese said.

But Betsy shook her head.

"It wouldn't make any difference. It wouldn't be *her*," she said brokenly. "Anyway, I've got to get used to it."

They left her at last to sleep alone for the first time in nearly sixty years. Her low, endless sobbing followed them down the stairs.

The funeral was on Saturday. Kind neighbour hands cooked the dinner, fetched black veils and bonnets, brought more food already prepared to the back door. David had come at once and taken charge of the hardest arrangements. He and Jeannie stood together looking at the still face in the parlour. The sharp, finely cut features had fallen into lines of a patrician dignity.

"Isn't she like Father?" David said at last.

"Yes. The mouth and brow. . . ."

The Judge drew a long heavy breath.

"Well, you could say of Liza Jane that, no matter what came or went, she would always do her duty. I don't know a better epitaph."

The family sat upstairs in the hall during the service. The same songs were sung as had been used when James died, and Daniel and Sarah: "The Lord's My Shepherd," and "How Firm a Foundation!" It was all in the familiar lines without any added words from Dr. Rayburn:

*"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in His excellent word!*

. . . . .



*"When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,  
My grace all-sufficient shall be thy supply;  
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design  
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.*

*"E'en down to old age, all my people shall prove  
My sov'reign, eternal, unchangeable love;  
And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn,  
Like lambs they shall still in my bosom be borne."*

The words rose from the throats of the congregation gathered below. Slowly, surely, with no questioning in the syllables, the old friends and neighbours of a lifetime sang the noble threnody for Liza Jane.

When at last there was the moving sound of many feet below and the low voice of authority of Mr. Jones the undertaker, Betsy crumpled in her chair. They worked over her, begging her to go back to bed—not to attempt going to the cemetery. But Betsy was pathetically determined. David all but carried her down the stairs and into the carriage where Jeannie and Connie sat opposite.

It was a dreary ride, down the stony road beyond Main Street and up to the bleakness of the hill beyond. The wind came cutting and moaning through the massed pine trees at the top of the cemetery, and the grave with its cold wet clay yawned, unthinkable, intolerable, before them.

Connie felt a physical sickness overcoming her. Through the tears that streamed from her eyes she saw in a blur the face of old Mrs. Woods, looking not into the grave but far off over the hills; she saw the thin white hair of Dr. Rayburn blown in the wind as he held his hat across his breast.

"Earth to earth! Ashes to ashes! Dust to dust! But we look for a city which hath foundations. Whose builder and maker is God."

They could feel Betsy trembling as they drove back in the carriage, and when they were in the house they knew she was having a chill.

"She goes out so seldom, and the wind up there was so piercing. Oh, we should have made her stay at home," Jeannie lamented as they got her to bed, with hot flatirons and bags of hot salt about her. David brought the doctor, who pronounced it a case of extreme shock coupled with the unusual exposure. A few days in bed should bring her around all right. But he told David out on the porch that her vitality was very low.

Betsy was never up again. The doctor did his best. Terese and Jeannie, alternating in the sick room, tried to bring an atmosphere of cheerfulness. They urged her to get well soon and finish the new quilt. They talked of the coming wedding. Betsy smiled wanly but was no longer interested. The support of her life had been removed. How could she stand alone? She sank finally into a half-coma that lasted for weeks.

Over and over as the days dragged on, a strange word beat in Connie's brain—the *change*. Neighbours, coming to the house, asked in low voices, "Do you expect a *change* soon?" and Jeannie and Terese as they sadly made the necessary plans, laying out white muslin undergarments, sponging and pressing Betsy's best black cashmere, the tears dropping as they worked, said softly to each other, "If there should be a *change* to-night. . . ."

Connie, to whom death had been till now an abstraction, began to think with a fierce earnestness upon it: this grim and terrible force that struck not only at the security of other family circles, but even at her own. What was this stupendous change, and when did it occur? For many days Betsy had lain unconscious of all that went on about her. Only the body feebly breathed. Where was the spirit? Had it already gone, or was it hovering behind the blankets, waiting for the last beat

of the outworn machine? As Connie drove to and from her school and attended to her duties there, she pondered on these things.

Then late one night, as she and her mother and Terese sat beside the bed, Betsy's eyes suddenly opened wide. They looked far and away, shining, dazzled, rapturous! They stayed so, until at last Terese leaned over and pressed them gently shut. The *change*, whatever it was, had taken place.

When everything was over and Jeannie and Connie were alone in the brick house, Connie feared for her mother. She was wearied to the point of exhaustion from the long nursing and the sorrow. But to the girl's surprise Jeannie gathered her forces together, and her cheerfulness was not entirely feigned. The grief was always there, but it was not of the despairing kind. Little by little Connie began to realise how repressed her mother's life had been through the years. Liza Jane had been born to command, and Betsy to concur with her. Jeannie as the youngest had always given up.

"I wonder if we could get Terese to help us move the piano!" Jeannie said eagerly one day. "I've never liked it there—it's such a dark corner. I always wanted it here between the windows—but poor Liza Jane was so set on having it where it is. . . . And I'll change the pictures, too, Connie. I have several lovely ones in the attic that your father and I had. . . . They are so much better than these; but the girls of course were fond of their own, so I didn't urge it."

So it went from day to day. A hundred trifles, small in themselves, but revealing Jeannie's patient surrendering of her own wishes through the years. There was now, too, no need for surreptitious kisses, no need to wait until they were alone to discuss the inmost secrets of their hearts. Connie and her mother found that, while they bore with them day by day the tender sorrow of remem-

brance that often brought the tears, yet they could still be happier together than they had ever been.

They talked now endlessly of the wedding and Connie's new life, and also of the trip abroad.

"Of course we *may* lose the suit," Jeannie would always end wistfully, "but I'm going to hope while I can. Nobody knows how I want to go. I want to see the 'dreaming spires' of Oxford, and I want to stand beside the Avon River at Stratford, and I want to see London and Paris and the Mediterranean!"

They talked it all over and over, adding new plans to the old ones they had made years ago as Connie sat at the foot of her mother's bed at night, Connie with something like a stab in her heart realising how intense and of how long-standing was this dream of her mother's.

"You see, if we get the coal money we can have every comfort on the trip. Maybe it's wrong, but I would like just once to do what I want to do without having to look twice at every penny. Oh, I would like——"

Jeannie stopped short. It would not do to make her other desires too definite, for Connie might do something rash with her slender stock of teaching savings, and she would need it all for her wedding plans. She couldn't tell Connie or David either that she longed for a new ready-made silk dress and a new coat, with a fur collar, just a small one! It was vain and wicked of her anyway! Of course if they won the coal suit . . .

As to Connie, she did not realise until afterwards that her mother's stock of clothes had scarcely changed in five years. Jeannie wore them with such a grace, sewing in a bit of white ruching here or a touch of lace there, pressing, and altering to suit the style and never once mentioning her longing for new garments. Even under the sharp knowing scrutiny of the town women Jeannie always made what they called "a nice appearance." Somehow, her eager, smiling face and bright eyes, the

irrepressible curls peeping beneath her hat were what one remembered. Sometimes there was popular discussion.

"Well, I'm sure Jeannie doesn't put much of her income on her back!" one woman would say to another.

"Oh, well it's natural for her to want Connie to have things. Of course Connie's been earning her own money these last years. You would think——"

"But I've an idea it has taken it about all for them to live on. The farm can't bring them in very much just now, and even with help from David, there's two sets of taxes, mind, to pay and insurance to keep up on the barn."

"Well, Jeannie'll likely get a new dress for the wedding, anyway!"

When Ian came at Easter there was not the same hilarity in the brick house that there had been on other visits, but there was deep happiness. Ian had received a call to the Presbyterian Church at Marsdon and had accepted! So he and Connie could go to the white manse right after the wedding trip. He had stopped there on his way to New Salem and taken some snapshots of the church and the parsonage. Jeannie and Connie pored over them. The manse was more beautiful and the church larger than they had dared to hope for. Ian had measured the windows of the living-room and one of the bedrooms at Connie's request so that she could have curtains already made for that much of the house at least. There was reality now for all their dreaming. Ian said they might tell their friends, and show the pictures, too. He had a fine pride in his bearing as that of a man who is able to provide well for his wife. Indeed the word *wife* slipped often from his tongue in a tone that rang in Jeannie's heart. Their love was beautiful to see. And somehow she was not shut out from it. She was to make long visits with them. Her own experience as a young minister's wife would help Connie. What time she spent in New Salem she would not really be



alone, for she and Terese would be much together. As to the trip abroad, Ian was all enthusiasm.

"Oh, wonderful!" he said. "And I'll tell you what we'll do. If you do win the suit and get the money, you and Connie go on, and I'll meet you there for a couple of weeks. They told me I could have a month's vacation in the fall, and I think I can squeeze out enough money to take myself! Say, wouldn't that be just about perfect!"

They sat up each night till hours of which Liza Jane would have disapproved—making plans, all three of them; and then, when Jeannie slipped off to bed, Ian and Connie still sat, grudging the passing minutes. Connie, watching his face intently, thought it looked thinner than at Christmas, and sometimes as he stared in the fire a worried look came into his eyes, a drawn expression to the mouth.

"Ian—is anything troubling you?"

He started. "Why, what made you ask that?"

"Just the way you look once in a while, when we're alone."

"I'm the happiest, luckiest man alive!"

"Maybe you're working too hard?"

"I guess it's the work, Connie. You see, I go up for examination for both licensure and ordination in May. I'm getting ready, of course."

"But you don't think they'll be so terribly hard, do you?"

"I hope not, darling. Let me hold you close and forget them—till I get back to the Seminary."

Then, after a moment, Connie felt his breath coming heavily, almost like a sigh.

"I wish I could have a talk with your Uncle David," he said.

"I'm sorry he had court this week. But I've told him he has to save us plenty of time for the wedding in June! He'll give me away, you know."



Ian's arms tightened. "Sweet! I can't believe yet I'm the man to whom you're going to be given!"

In spite of all that has been said and written in regard to a small town—by those usually who know very little about it—the true village still remains the stronghold of a certain type of tolerance and liberalism. The sinner, for example—if he is indigenous to the place—can be more comfortable here than anywhere else. He will be talked about in private and prayed over in public, but he will be treated with kindness. The peaceful familiarity that long association brings, enfolds him. More than this, his evil-doing affords a safe vicarious moral outlet for all the evil instincts in the souls of his upright neighbours.

Staid, sober New Salem men, who would never have dreamed of touching the alcoholic cup that all their training had taught them contained hell's own beverage, yet watched with a curious lightened look in their eyes and a far-away young expression on their faces, as old Jim Bosler, the town's one drunkard, went swinging uproariously along Main Street on one of his periodical sprees.

Chaste, honestly wed women, quiet keepers at home, talked over with vivid relish the details of a young girl's flagrant misstep. But unless she was brazen about it, she was drawn back gradually into the intimate enfolding fellowship of the village. There were always a few small spiteful feuds abroad between neighbour and neighbour, caused usually by jealousy; but when it came to real evil, the town condemned the sin and forgave the sinner.

So in the matter of the conventions in regard to death itself a liberalism born of intimacy prevailed. It was not necessary for every mourner to wear black for six months or a year, either out of respect to the dead or for social protection. Every one in town knew pretty accurately the degree of family devotion that had prevailed. Every one

knew all the circumstances, understood, sympathised. It was not necessary to lay abrupt hands upon one's habit of life in any particular.

So, in the eyes of the townsfolk and also in those of Jeannie and Constance, it seemed natural for the parties planned before the death of the aunts to take place. The old must die, the young must wed, and the hearts of the townspeople were close enough to elemental things to accommodate sorrow and joy together, as Nature herself does.

April, therefore, was as gay as the modest resources of the village could make it, with gift parties for the bride. And to most of them Jeannie was invited, too. She was getting much too tired, she realised, what with the added work of the house and the steady excitement of the wedding preparations. But surely she could rest when it was all over. There would be nothing to do, indeed! Mrs. Woods and Terese were wonderful, helping her with the sewing. The long ruffled petticoats were the hardest, with their yards and yards of hemming, but there ought to be at least four of them of fine muslin in the trousseau with the one dark silk one ready-made for travelling!

They finished up the quilts, too, with Mrs. Woods insisting merrily that they must put the cat in each one according to the old custom, while the four of them held the corners. To her huge delight the cat each time jumped towards Terese—a sure sign of another wedding!

“I knew it!” Mrs. Woods cried. “She’s got some old farmer just waiting for her to say the word, I’ll be bound! Or are you interested in higher bushes and bigger berries?” she asked teasingly.

The chance shot sent the colour into Terese’s cheeks, but no one except Jeannie saw it.

The wedding was set for the 15th of June. By the first of May, the two big trunks were brought from the attic and the finished sewing laid in them. The petticoats,

measuring seven yards around the feet, lay in billows, with the lace-trimmed corset covers and the piles of neatly pressed shirtwaists above them. The quilts and the towels edged with hand-knit lace or tatting, the sheets and pillow cases, embroidered with C. R.—all the gifts of love that many hands had created were laid with small packets of sachet, in the trunks.

Connie trod on air. She had notified the school directors she would not be teaching again. The children on the last day of the term had come armed with assorted presents. The buggy was filled with them as she drove home. It was one more exciting proof to Jeannie of the warm esteem in which Connie was held. Except for the sound in her ears sometimes at night as of Time rushing by like a wind, Jeannie had lost her strange depression. An almost unreal buoyancy drove her on each day. They would hear next month, David hoped, about the coal. That news—if it was good—would take up her mind after the wedding.

On a beautiful May morning, Connie sang as she dressed, and still sang as she helped with the work after breakfast. The weather was perfect—the air warm, the young leaves newly green, the budding grapevine sweet with perfume. It was a day designed for happiness.

“I’ll run down to the post office for the mail and the papers before I sit down to my sewing,” Connie said.

She caught up her wide sailor hat, and hurried off down the street. All about her was an enfolding atmosphere of good will. She knew that just now she was the centre of town interest. She loved them—all the neighbours and friends ! She loved New Salem ! Every crooked stone in its sidewalks ; every shabby house and stable.

She turned into Main Street and spoke brightly to Mrs. Barnes out sweeping her sidewalk. Mrs. Barnes answered slowly.

“Well, Connie,” she managed, and that was all.

Connie was surprised. They surely hadn't offended her in any way. She grew more mystified and full of fear the farther she went. Several women reading the morning paper together looked at her as though she were far away, and said, "Good-morning, Connie," in a strange pitying tone. One woman stepped into a store when she saw her coming. *What was the matter?* Had she left anything undone in the way of grateful appreciation of everybody's kindness?

With a heavy uneasiness she entered the post office. Mr. Drum, the Postmaster, handed her the mail, along with the *Pittsburgh Gazette*. Then he leaned forward, his shrewd old eyes kindly.

"If I was you, Connie, I wouldn't read that paper till you get home. They often get things mixed in papers anyways."

Connie looked wildly up Main Street; then, crossing quickly, she left it behind her. She would go home by way of the alley where no one would see her. The paper! Something that concerned her was in the paper! Something menacing. . . . Her heart beat throbbingly in her breast. Her hands shook as she unfolded the *Gazette*.

She did not have to look far. In the lower part of the first page the headlines were blackly prominent.

### YOUNG MEN DENY FAITH!

*Applicants for the Presbyterian Ministry Refused Licensure by Presbytery!*

Blackwood, N.Y., May 14.—Ian Donaldson and James Whitney, two members of this year's graduating class at Union Theological Seminary, New York City, were denied license to preach by the Blackwood Presbytery in Session here to-day. The young men, admittedly two of the most brilliant of their class, were found to be evasive on certain doctrinal points. When they were questioned more directly they confessed that they did not believe in the Virgin Birth or the verbal inspiration

of the Holy Scriptures. Both young men had already accepted calls to churches but will doubtless be compelled to cancel them.

Connie read it stupidly over and over, and yet again. She told herself that in a moment she would wake up happily in her bed and laugh at this strange nightmare.

But slowly the all too solid earth beneath her, the familiar reality of the old black stables bordering the alley, and the houses showing between the trees had to be reckoned with. She was awake. The words of the paper were true. Something deeply embedded in her subconscious mind rose now to assure her bitterly that the paper made no mistake. Chance words of Ian that she had paid no attention to at the time, like the Bishop Colenso story, came back to her to prove the way his thought had been tending; and his harried eyes the last time he was home! He had indeed been dreading the examination before Presbytery, but not in the way she had supposed. And now Ian, her Ian whom she had trusted, looked up to—almost worshipped—Ian *had denied the faith!* Had been refused license to preach!

A blackness swept over her, a faintness. She sank down on the grass bordering the alley, leaning her dizzy head against the boarding behind her. The unusual, unromantic quality of the place made no impression upon her. She was sick with a mortal sickness of the heart.

At last, when she could gather her forces together, she got to her feet and went slowly home. Strange how a deadly blow to the mind could drain all the strength and elasticity from the limbs, she thought dully.

When she entered the brick house Jeannie spoke brightly from her work.

"Any news to-day?" she asked, smiling.

Then she knew as she looked up that there was news indeed.



"Connie!" Her face whitened already. "What is it?"  
Connie thrust the paper into her mother's hands.  
"Read that!"

And Jeannie read. Her face as she finished looked drained and old.

"My child," she said, "it can't be true!"

The two women sat opposite each other, stricken dumb with the shock of it. At last Connie spoke slowly.

"Yes, it's true. And it seems to me like the end of the world."

And somehow they could not talk about it. For the first time in their lives mother and daughter were at a loss for words to communicate each to each. They went quietly about the work of the day—avoiding as by common consent the sewing of the wedding garments, their eyes heavy with unshed tears. And while there was no voice each heard the despair of the other's heart crying aloud.

Ian had denied the faith! He would not be a minister. He and Connie would not live in the white manse at Marsdon. (For which the window curtains were lying now, hemmed and pressed, in the trunk.) There could be no wedding in June when there was no work awaiting them. But over and above it all like a note of doom: Ian had *denied the faith!*

Then, as they sat that evening at supper, making a poor attempt at eating, the door bell rang and it was Ian himself—a haggard Ian with tired eyes. He took Connie hungrily in his arms, but even as he kissed her it was plain that her heart was withdrawn from him. Jeannie did the kindly things. It was she who hurried to bring warm food, who forced a note of cheerfulness into the ordinary questions of how he had got out from Greensburg, and whether there might be rain in the air. But against the terrible silence of the two lovers all attempts at light conversation failed.



Ian ate little. When he had finished he spoke abruptly.

"You've seen the morning paper?"

"Yes," Connie said. And then, "Is it true, Ian?"

"Oh, it's true enough. I've been dreading the examination ever since—well, ever since I've known where I stood. But I meant somehow to evade the issue. Then at last, when they cornered me, I *had* to tell the truth! Don't you see, Connie, I *had* to be honest!"

But Connie did not speak.

Jeannie rose. "Go on into the parlour, children, where you can talk by yourselves. I'll straighten up the kitchen, Connie."

Ian caught her arm. His eyes looked hunted.

"Mrs. Richards, you don't hate me, do you?"

Jeannie drew his face down to hers and kissed him.

"My dear boy!" she whispered.

All his life Ian was to remember the kindness of that kiss.

In the parlour they did not sit down. They stood as they had done on that other night when Ian first took her in his arms. But now between them a gulf was fixed.

"Don't look at me so, Connie! I can't stand it. It's all such a ghastly disappointment. I'm sort of stunned. And I realise only too well what I've done to you by this! But nothing is hopeless as long as we have each other. As long as we are the same."

"But we're not the same, and we never can be again," Connie said slowly, her white lips framing the words as with care.

"How can you say that? How can this affect our love?"

"Because you are not the person I've always thought you to be. You're a stranger!"

"Connie!" His voice was harsh in its intensity. "I won't let you say that. It's not true."

But Connie went on with a tragic finality.

"Everything we've planned is over, and I feel as if our

love is over with it. How can you say you haven't changed? Before, your religion was the centre of your life. Now all at once you've thrown it overboard."

"But I haven't, Connie! That's unjust of you. My religion means as much to me as it ever did—more, if anything. And I still want to be a minister, and I intend to be!"

"A minister!" Connie's voice was scornful. "And what have you to preach about—now?"

There was a moment's silence in which something like anger flamed over Ian's face and was controlled. When he spoke, his words were low.

"Can you not see that I still have the same message to preach which the Master himself had?"

"Don't add blasphemy to the rest of it, Ian!" Connie said sharply.

"I don't mean to." His words were still quiet. "I said that in all humility. But—— Oh, Connie, this is all beside the mark of you and me. Even if all our plans have to be changed just now——" He stopped and swallowed hard. "Of course, the Marsdon people will withdraw their call."

"Of course. You can't blame them."

"But, even so, I'll find a way. I have a little income, you know—though it isn't enough to be married on just now——"

He broke off again. "The wedding would have been four weeks from to-day! Oh, Connie!"

For an instant their eyes met with the old light. He took a quick step towards her to take her in his arms. But Connie did not yield. Her face froze again into white nunlike lines as though formed for renunciation.

"I can't see any way out for us, Ian. This thing would always be between us. To me it's like a disgrace. And the thought of what you did—of the way you feel—frightens me. It seems to hold me away from you. I

could never be proud of you as I was before, or trust you as I did. I'm so terribly, so bitterly disappointed and hurt, that all I want you to do is to—go away."

"You don't mean—for always?"

"Yes."

For a moment Ian stood as though he had been struck. Then he began eagerly.

"Connie, darling, you don't mean that. You *can't* mean that! You still love me!"

"It's as though my heart were dead inside. When I think of you denying everything that's so precious to me—I simply feel that I don't know you."

"Then you—really mean that you—don't want to see me or hear from me—again?"

"I think, under the circumstances, that would be best."

A white pride fell upon Ian's set features. He turned without another word and left the house.

Connie stood where she was until his footsteps died away along the walk. She thought then with a mechanical practicality about the ring. The beautiful diamond that had delighted the whole town. She must mail it back—in a suitable box—registered.

And then she sank down on the sofa, shaken at last with long, shuddering sobs.

When Jeannie started up the stairs that night after making the rounds of the doors and windows which Liza Jane had always attended to, she felt sickeningly weary. She knew that something vital within her had broken as the mainspring in the old clock had once done. She paused—she who usually ran up the stairs—as though they were too much for her. She leaned her head upon the round banister top.

"Poor Ian," she was thinking. "Hurrying here as fast as he could come with his trouble to Connie. And she gave him no comfort. She sent him away! She's broken with him! And yet I can't blame her. Such a blow to

all her hopes. Oh, it's cruel! It's cruel! And then to think of what Ian did . . . ! He must be beside himself! Maybe they couldn't ever have been happy—after this. I don't know. . . . If only James were here! He would know how to comfort them both. Poor Ian! Poor Connie! My heart bleeds for her. . . .”

At last she went slowly up. Connie's door was shut.

The next weeks were very hard. And while Connie, wrapped in the distance of her own hurt, did not realise it then, the burden of them fell upon Jeannie. Not only did her mother save her from the actual fatigue of the housework (and Connie did look white), she strained every nerve to keep up a cheerfulness before her, and to divert her mind. It was Jeannie who met the many curious callers coming at impossibly early hours on hot afternoons. It was Jeannie who carried the quilt back to the Woman's Missionary Society, explaining as best she could the reason for its return. This being no less difficult since every one knew all the circumstances, at any rate.

Straining every nerve to save her child from shock while her own heart ached intolerably, Jeannie answered the town's questions, trying to meet each attitude in kind from that which said, “Oh, and him such a *fine* young man!” to that which prophesied, “Well, there's as good fish in the sea as ever was caught.”

David had come out for a week-end, and his stay had been a comfort to Jeannie at least. He had been very silent with Connie, only saying:

“Be careful, my dear, not to make a mistake. You're very young. Things may look different to you later. Don't act in haste. Aren't you planning to marry Ian at all?”

“I can't, Uncle David.”

“Well, that's something no one can decide for you.”

When Jeannie pressed him for his opinion on Ian's

frightful defection, he looked very grave and chose his words with care.

"No man, Jeannie, should be blamed for going as far as his mind honestly takes him. The trouble with the average human being is that he never goes on mental journeys. He stops at the first way station and refuses to believe there is country beyond. Now, fortunately or unfortunately, Ian's mind is the exploring type."

"But, David"—Jeannie was baffled and anxious—"you don't really think—you don't feel that what Ian said is——?"

"Now, now, Jeannie! What I mean is this: Whether Ian's conclusions are true or false, he was honest against a tremendous temptation to be otherwise. And for that I respect him. Now, no more theology! But I'm distressed over the havoc it's all made with Connie's happiness! She seems almost hard about it."

"Yes," Jeannie said sadly. "It's taken something out of her that I fear will never come back, for of course she still loves him. Oh, it's been a bitter thing for her, David. I can't even look at the wedding clothes myself! And all the presents she'd gotten already! We don't know what to do with them. And she was so in love with the picture of the Marsdon manse. It had begun to seem home to her already. You can't blame her for being embittered, can you, Davy?"

"No, to a girl like Connie it must all have seemed a death blow."

When the judge said good-bye to them it was to be for some time, for he was planning a vacation in the West. He had never been to California, and was leaving soon for a month's stay. Margaret, his wife, was sailing for England to study woman suffrage ideas there. David looked shrewdly at Jeannie before he left.

"Aren't you thin? Now, don't take this too much to heart, Jeannie. Connie's young, and all sorts of things

may happen yet. But I think you'd better get yourself a tonic or something."

Jeannie made a face. "I don't like tonics! I had too much boneset tea when I was a girl. I'm just tired. I've been on such a strain. It's seeing her hopes ruined, Davy, that hurts so! But—I'll be all right."

"And Harrington's promised to come out himself and tell you the coal news when there is any. The hold-up for the last six weeks has been the judge in the case. He had pneumonia just when the thing was ready to go into his hands, and he's been off recuperating since. He's to be back soon now, I believe, and then we'll get the decision, whatever it is. Harrington's pretty sure, but I don't want you to count on it *too* much. Harrington will wire me. And I'll keep you posted where I am, of course. Good-bye, Jeannie!"

"Good-bye, Davy! Oh, I hate to see you go! Good-bye." She watched him out of sight from the west window.

That evening Billy Brown came. In Connie's desperate unhappiness she had never given a thought to Billy. Now, as she saw him come into the parlour, she remembered his last visit.

"Well, Connie, I'm as good as my word, ain't I?"

He was trying, she could tell, to make his tone light and yet assured.

"I told you if anything went wrong with your plans I'd—we could still—I see you're not wearing your ring."

"No."

"Is—is everything broke off between you and the preacher?"

"Yes."

"A good job, too, after the way he turned out. Well, Connie, then we can start in again where we left off, can't we?"

The eagerness of his heavy voice was hard to bear.



"I'm afraid not, Billy. I wish I could."

"What do you mean by that? I'll marry you to-morrow if you say so. Say, what about goin' right on with the wedding for the 15th of June—just like you planned? You've got your things ready! Huldah and the other girls have their bridesmaids' dresses an' everything. I don't care what anybody says about me taking second place. We were goin' together before this other fellow ever—— And, say, it would keep up your pride before the town, wouldn't it?"

And then Billy stopped at the sight of her face. She did not speak, but Billy, watching her, drew a long breath.

"You wouldn't want to do that—huh?"

"No, Billy."

"Well——"

He stood baffled, anxious before her. And the final words were hard to say.

"Billy, I must tell you. I can't ever marry you. I'm *so* sorry, but I can't."

She saw the hope go out of his blue eyes. His heavy shoulders seemed to sag. His invincibility left him. His money could not buy him his heart's desire.

"Well, good-bye, Connie," he said slowly. "I won't bother you again."

As though at a crossroads of a journey, Connie answered, "Good-bye." She had never felt more respect for Billy than when he went away that night.

The passing of Jeannie was so quiet, so sudden that no one in town except Dr. Foster himself—and Constance—knew that she was ill. When she sent for the doctor apologetically at last she cautioned Connie not to tell any one.

Even while he was listening to the agonisingly heavy beats of her heart, Jeannie's eyes were twinkling at him.

"I probably only need some sulphur and molasses.

You know, doctor, I'm never sick long, so you can't expect to get rich from me!"

He had returned the joke as he gently folded back the dress on Jeannie's breast. Then, from his long experience in knowing that death brooks no compromise, he quietly told Connie the truth in the hall below. He had judged the girl well. She made no outcry, only swayed a little, caught at the chair beside her and set her teeth to hear the rest of his sentence.

"It may be a month or it may be to-night. I can't tell. But you must be prepared."

"Does—she know?"

"No. And this is one case where nothing could be gained by telling her. This is hard for you, my girl."

Hard. Connie considered the word dully as the doctor turned away. Hard for her. Like saying to a man having his heart cut out of his breast that it might hurt him a little. Hard. It was death itself. Ian banished from her life, and Jeannie leaving it. There would be no reason then to go on living. And because there fell upon her the absolute disregard for everything left in the world except her mother, Connie was able to do what she did in the next week.

She would write to Uncle David now in California, but aside from that she would tell no one the truth. Jeannie's ignorance of her condition was safer so. When Terese came, or Mrs. Woods, she would say that her mother was doing well. The weight on her heart was already so great that the knowledge borne in secret could add little to it. Like a player upon the stage, Connie forced herself to the part. She must be more cheerful. All at once she realised her selfishness of the last two months. Her mother's heart was literally worn out with the burden she had allowed her to carry.

"It's her heart," the doctor had said.

Strange, Connie thought as that day and the night

wore on, that anything so gay, so hopeful, so loving as Jeannie's heart could be the means of her dissolution at the last.

"It's her heart."

Connie shut her lips hard. There should be no more weight upon that heart now. So, with eyeballs burning from sleeplessness and her throat tight, she made herself sing as she prepared Jeannie's breakfast.

"Was that you singing, Connie?"

"Why, yes! It's such a glorious morning."

"Then you are feeling a little less—sad?"

"Oh, yes! Things will all come out right sometime!"

"My dear! That's the best medicine I've had yet! How long did the doctor say I'd have to stay in bed?"

"Oh, he didn't say. Just till you get rested."

"It's ridiculous for *me* to be in bed! I'm never sick. Connie, I've a feeling we'll hear about the coal to-day."

"Maybe. Let's plan the trip, anyway."

Jeannie's eyes filled with happy tears.

"Oh, Connie, you're interested in it again! Now we'll have something to take up our minds. Bring me those books on England, will you, the next time you're coming up? I'll make out a little itinerary while I'm lying here."

She drew a deep breath.

"The voyage would just put me on my feet again! Strange how I long for the sea when I've never even seen it! Listen! Isn't that some one at the front door now?"

Jeannie was constantly listening, those days, for the sound of a carriage stopping, a strange foot on the walk, a ring at the bell!

Terese slept in the house at night, and Mrs. Woods came often. One evening she sat later than usual while they all discussed the coal case and the possibility of the great trip. When she started home Terese walked with her down the street.

When they had gone Connie went about the sick-room

smoothing the bed, putting out the light, arranging the windows. It was a close night for June, but the warm air was rich with honeysuckle. Jeannie lay very quiet till Connie was ready to leave. Then she sat up suddenly, starting from the bed in her old impulsive way.

"I want to go to the window, Connie, and see the stars. I get so homesick for them, shut up here. . . . You needn't help me."

Before Connie could reach her she had tripped over the hassock by the arm-chair. Through the darkness came the faint sound of her laughter:

"David always said when I was on my way to heaven——"

But the sentence was never finished—for Jeannie had fallen . . . upon sleep.

When the women came hurrying back with white faces, brought by Connie's frantic call from the window, Mrs. Woods stayed and Terese ran for the doctor, though they all knew he need not hasten. Connie stood with clenched hands, her anguish beyond all tears, her heart as stone in her breast watching Mrs. Woods. The old woman, her face wet with her weeping, was going quietly about the room, doing those small decent things which should be done in the presence of death. She was speaking brokenly, gently, as she worked.

"Yes, yes, Jeannie! You've gone on a longer journey than you thought. . . . Yes, yes. . . . It's all right. . . . We all have to go some time. . . . Yes, yes, Jeannie, you'll get your rest now. . . ."

The thin little thread of speech ran on with its burden of timeless wisdom, its even acceptance of the passing of a human soul.

". . . Yes, yes, Jeannie. There'll be a glad reunion in heaven this night . . . but, oh, we'll miss you here. . . . It's all right, though. . . . Yes, yes, we all have to go some time. . . ."

Through the next days, men and women looked strangely at Connie. But she could not explain that she walked and spoke as two people. Outwardly she moved calmly, dry-eyed through the scenes of the funeral and burial. From a far distance, as down a long echoing corridor, she heard her own voice conferring with Mr. Jones, the undertaker; speaking casually, almost brightly, to the steady procession of men and women who came to look once more upon Jeannie's face. She overheard some one say once: "It isn't *natural*! And I always thought she was so fond of her mother!" For the first time New Salem was baffled in its intimate knowledge:

But she could not tell them that the real self of her was drowned in such a blackness of despairing grief that no other human being might look upon nor share it.

She had wired David at once, but of course he could not reach there for a week, even at the best. And he might not come on now, since he could render no service to Jeannie. She had suggested to him to make out his visit.

So it happened that Constance and Terese stood alone together at the grave, with only the old neighbours clustered near, the still fresh mounds of earth that covered the mortality of Liza Jane and Betsy before them.

Even here Connie could not weep. With her face set and her eyes dry, she watched the ancient, agonising ceremony of committal, and knew that, no matter what the years might bring, her heart could never suffer more.

Terese and Mrs. Woods both stayed with her that night. What she would do later could not be decided until David came. The message had reached him after some delay, and his wire came back at once:

Returning as soon as possible. Be brave. Love.

D. McDOWELL.

Sometimes in the eerie night hours, when Connie lay awake, the longing for Ian came overwhelmingly. She even decided to write him of her mother's death. And then, with the daylight, came the barrier of pride and cruel disappointment coupled with a new bitterness. Of course, she could see now that Jeannie's health had been failing for months, but the shock of Ian's trouble and the worry and distress attendant upon the breaking of the engagement had certainly aggravated the heart condition. In a sense Ian had helped cause her mother's death. Though she realised this was not truly just, the whole burden pressed upon her too sorely. She could lift no finger to send him word. That chapter of her life was ended.

On the fourth day after Jeannie's burial, Terese went to her own house, leaving Connie alone for an hour in the afternoon. She was sitting on the back porch, weak and listless from the reaction of the terrible week, her eyes resting dully on the far hills beyond the creek.

Suddenly she heard the sound of a carriage stopping before the house, then a firm step on the sidewalk, and a quick ring of the bell. She walked through the house and opened the door. A strange man stood there, smiling, his hat in his hand.

"Miss Richards?"

"Yes."

"I'm Mr. Harrington. Your uncle, of course, has told you of me."

"Mr. Harrington," Connie repeated mechanically. And then, as though the words from long habit came of themselves: "Won't you come in?"

"Thanks. I'm very happy to come out to-day. Your mother—is she here?"

"No." The constriction in Connie's throat allowed only this syllable. She must explain, of course, but not till she got control of herself.



Mr. Harrington was still smiling. He was a man in his late thirties, of medium height, well dressed, well groomed, with a strong-featured, rather handsome face. He was hurrying on.

"Well, I'll go ahead and tell you the good news. We've won the case! And, what's more, the coal company is going to buy the farm—*and the coal under it*—for a very pretty sum. I waited a day or two after the decision to go over details with their lawyers. Miss Richards, I can practically promise you \$75,000!"

It was only then that he began to notice a strangeness about this beautiful dark-eyed girl who sat quietly before him, her face chiselled as though from marble.

"Miss Richards," he said, his voice dropping suddenly from its buoyant tone, "you're not ill!"

She shook her head slowly. Her stiff lips finally formed the words.

"My mother waited and hoped twenty years for the coal to sell. Mr. Harrington, she died last week."

He could not answer for a moment, and then, stammering, he began: "Miss Richards! I have no words to tell you how distressed I am—for your loss, and for coming in upon you like this. I had heard nothing. . . . I——"

He stopped, conscious himself of the empty inadequacy of speech against the white anguish of this girl's face.

And then something within Connie rose to a flame.

"It's not believable! I didn't know life could *be* so cruel! If you knew how she wanted this money—even a little of it! How she planned year in and year out for a trip abroad, and—and other things! And up to the very last day she was listening for you to come bringing the news." A dry sob broke in Connie's throat. "Can't you see how I hate the very thought of the money now?"

Harrington rose to his feet, his face sobered.

"Yes, I can see that, Miss Richards, and also that my very presence here must be hard for you to bear. I'll

be at my office every day at this address." He laid a card on the table. "If I can be of the least service till your uncle gets back, won't you call on me?"

He walked quietly to the door. But before he was gone Connie, with her mother's own impulsive grace, hurried after him. Without knowing she did it, she caught his arm.

"You must forgive me. You've worked so hard on the case, and you came here to-day so happy over the outcome! I do understand that, but I'm just a little beside myself when I think——"

He looked down at her with wonder, and something very gentle in his eyes.

"There is surely no apology needed to me," he said "I only wish I could help you in any way whatever. Good-bye, Miss Richards."

On the way back to Greensburg to get the train, Harrington pondered on the tragic situation, but most of all upon the girl he had just met. In all his rather wide experience as a bachelor, he had never encountered a personality like this. He had never had a woman look up into his face with an absolute unconsciousness of herself—and of him, as a man. Here was beauty and intelligence, certainly, with another quality that left him a little shaken as he contemplated it.

That night Connie drank deep of the waters of bitterness. She told Terese of the word Mr. Harrington had brought. Terese marvelled.

"You'll be the richest girl in the countryside!" she said.

But Connie cried out as though she had struck her.

"Don't! Oh, I can't bear it!"

She wandered out at last in the dusk, unable to sit still in the familiar rooms. She went down the street and into the yard of Mrs. Woods. She passed through the small apple orchard and on back to the kitchen where as a child she had spent so many happy hours.

The old woman was sitting in one of the high-backed rockers with the curious woven willow design. The great polished dresser reflected the soft lamplight behind her. There was about all her person a calm agelessness as though she had been bent but never broken by the winds of Time. At Connie's footfall she put aside her reading. She showed no surprise.

"Come in, Connie. The night air got a little too cool for me on the porch. Sit here, child. Yes, the crickets are starting in early this summer. I like them——"

"Mrs. Woods, the case is decided. I got the word to-day. The coal company is going to buy the farm."

The old woman started, looked at Connie, and read all she had not said in her drawn face. For a long while she sat in her chair, not speaking, her own countenance stricken. Then she said slowly:

"You must learn to drink the cup of life as it comes, Connie, without stirring it up from the bottom. That's where the bitter dregs are!"

"I can't stand this, Mrs. Woods."

"Yes, child. You've had more than your share of trouble all at once, but you're one of them that can bear up. So was your mother. It's in your blood."

She didn't argue or discuss the matter. She put a cushion behind Connie's head and then, rocking slowly back and forth, she began: "My, I mind once when I lived down Poke Run way just after I was married . . . when I had a terrible sickness and our barn burned down. . . ."

She talked on, and Connie, as the old woman intended, heard nothing but the low familiar singsong of her voice. Outside, a light wind that might bring rain stirred in the apple trees. Connie closed her eyes. There was no peace in her heart, but slowly the desperation of her earlier mood left her. She rested, letting a blankness take the place of the fiery turmoil that had rent her

When she rose to go at last, Mrs. Woods walked with her to the gate.

"That's right. Go on home and try to get your rest. And," she added gently, "your mother missed the coal, but, mind, she's got far better than that now."

As Connie walked up the street the words still rang in her ears.

"But *has* she?" the girl kept questioning, anguished. "If I could only be sure of that!"

The horror of the grave suddenly seemed to be the only reality in the universe. For the first time in her life her high and firm assurance failed her. A doubt, the blackest doubt of all, crept starkly into her mind. And when she knelt by her bed that night she could not pray. There was nothing left to pray for. If earth was empty—so was heaven.

David came the next week. His face was haggard and older. But after one look at Connie he threw off his own grief. There was but one thing to do, he said. She must come back with him at once to Pittsburgh. Aunt Margaret would probably be away all the winter if she extended her trip to include Europe, too.

"She probably won't stop over there," he forced himself to put in whimsically, "till she's filled all the Turkish harems with suffrage banners! So, Connie, I need you. And it will do you good. You've got to come away and see new sights for a while. And, Terese——"

"Yes, David."

"You'll see to closing up the house and watching it a little while she's gone, won't you?"

His eyes sought hers with a longing and a question in them. She gave him back his look. So well did they each know the other that in the glance it was understood between them that for the period of Connie's stay they would not meet.

The next afternoon a carriage from the livery stable

drove up to the door. Connie's trunk, from which Terese had tenderly removed the wedding garments, was hoisted to the front seat beside the driver. David and Connie said good-bye to the neighbours that had come to do what they could to help, and climbed into the back seat. As the carriage made the turn at the end of the street, Connie looked back. Terese had covered her face with her hands, but old Mrs. Woods stood erect, still watching. Her thin arm was raised as she waved her handkerchief.

Then the brick house was hidden from sight.

## CHAPTER SIX

THE HOME OF JUDGE MCDOWELL ON NEGLEY AVENUE was one of some dignity even for Pittsburgh. It was a large gray stone edifice, weathered by the severe seasons and the smoke-beclouded air. Its lawn was fairly spacious, though to the Judge's country-bred eye it seemed a bit cramped and artificial, even as the trees appeared to him to have a thwarted look as though they might also bear a homesickness within them for a far-flung hilltop or a lush pasture meadow.

To Connie, as they approached it at the end of their journey from New Salem, the house seemed to represent the pinnacle of luxury. She had made a few nervous overnight visits within it from time to time, but the personality of Aunt Margaret had not encouraged intimacy, and David's family had quietly and with dignity refrained from intruding upon her. Now, as she entered the wide hallway, for the first time Connie felt no constraint.

She greeted old Morris, whom she had always liked, and his wrinkled brown face looked from her to the Judge in kindly inquiry.

"Miss Connie is going to stay here for a while and keep us straight," the Judge said. "See to the trunk when it gets here, Morris. Now, my dear, come on upstairs and select your room. Just why two lone people like your aunt and me should have four extra bedrooms in the house is a mystery. But at any rate it gives you a little variety to choose from now."

"Which is yours?" Connie asked.

"Here," he said, throwing open a door.

"I think I'd like to be somewhere near," Connie said huskily.



"Of course. Then take this blue room. There's even a door through into mine, if you should ever want anything."

He did not say, of course, that once many years ago, and for a very short time, this door had meant something in his life. He only added now, "Your aunt's rooms are down in the south wing."

Then he kissed Jeannie's child and left her to rest.

During the next days Connie slowly became adjusted to the strange house. She was quick to sense the quality of the rooms. Margaret's militant taste had set its mark in the severe elegance of the parlour, the stiff-hanging bedroom curtains and the formal dignity of the dining-room. Connie studied them all with interest and then hurried back to the library, the one room the Judge had allowed no one but himself to furnish, and felt at home.

It was a large room, longer than it was wide, facing the west. The big fireplace was not allowed to be cleaned out too frequently, and so it had a comfortable and rather untidy mass of wood ashes always waiting for the next fire. The walls were lined with books, the chairs were leather and hollowed by long use to fit the body tenderly. There were no curtains at the windows to hide the sky. The Judge's great desk, a table with more books, and a Winged Victory on the mantelpiece completed the furnishings. Over it all there hung the rich fragrance of tobacco and burning logs. It was in this room that Connie relaxed and for long moments had ease from the pain of her heart.

Indeed, each day she found herself more able at least to hide her sorrow for Uncle David's sake. It was easier to do this when she knew his heart was torn with the same grief.

When she came down to breakfast the morning after her arrival David was pathetically pleased.

"What! Down so early, Connie? You don't need to get up for me, you know!"

"But I want to. And eight certainly isn't early."

David watched her across the wide table.

"This is a pleasant change for me! I'm accustomed to eating breakfast alone. And, curiously enough, I never feel so moved to discourse to some one on all the affairs of the nation as I do at breakfast time! So you see what you're in for. I wish this table weren't so big!"

"Couldn't we set a small one in the bay window there? It would be lovely, almost like eating outdoors."

"That's an idea. Talk to Morris about it, will you, Connie?"

So it came about that they breakfasted cosily at a small board, gay with flowers, Connie pouring his coffee from the tall urn and the Judge watching her with tender eyes.

Seeing his pleasure in the small change, Connie set herself to effect others. Old Morris' eagerness to help was pathetic. He worshipped his master.

"The Judge, he likes company, Miss Connie. Not the big set dinners, but just his good friends in now and then. The madam," he paused, eyeing Connie anxiously as though uncertain how far to confide in her, "the madam is very busy, you know, an' has to have things planned way ahead. The Judge, he's more informal."

"I understand, Morris. We'll see what we can do."

That evening, as she and David sat reading in the library, Connie dropped her book.

"Uncle David, aren't there some people—old friends of yours—you would like to ask in to dinner some time?"

"There are indeed," he said, surprised. "You're sure you would like it?"

"Of course."

"It would be a real treat to me. We—I—can't always plan things as I would like, you know. Let's see. Could we start next week with Harrington and his sister? I

think, Connie, we should ask him here. He told me about his trip out to New Salem. He doesn't blame you for the way you felt, and certainly I don't. But, after all, we are deeply indebted to him. And some day that money is going to mean a great deal to you——"

At the look of pain on Connie's face he stopped, and then added:

"If it hurts too much, we won't ask him."

"No. It would be utterly childish not to see him now. Please ask him and, you said—his sister?"

"Yes. Emily's a great old girl. I want you to know her. You need a woman friend here. She's about twenty years older than Phil and homely as they come, but she's got more spirit than six ordinary women. There was a big family of them, plenty of money; now all the children are married but these two, the oldest and the youngest. They have a house here and know everybody worth knowing in Pittsburgh. Emily's always as good as a tonic to me. I'm really quite fond of her. Let's see."

He walked over to the desk. "I'll phone them now and see when they can come. They're pretty gay—at least Harrington is."

He got Emily on the telephone, and the date was set for the following Monday.

"Plan a dinner, Connie, like you always had at home. No frills. Good fried chicken and mashed potatoes and pie for dessert, will you? And, Connie, how about clothes? I've been meaning to ask you. Wouldn't you like to take a run over to Horne's and get a new frock? We always have an account there, so I want you to feel free to get what you need, any time. But I'll go over with you to-morrow, if you like."

Connie stood the next afternoon before a tall mirror in the store and marvelled. The dress David selected was a soft foulard in the new Alice blue. The price was

twenty dollars. When Connie demurred because of it, David waved the objection aside.

"That's not too much, is it? I think your aunt pays more than that. Besides, I like this—if you do."

If *she* did! A faint spot of colour appeared on Connie's cheeks that had been so pale of late. For the dress did something strange to her. In it she was no longer Connie Richards of New Salem. She was Judge McDowell's niece of Pittsburgh.

They took the dress and a long light coat that David thought she needed. That night he looked up, chuckling, from the *New York Tribune*.

"Here you are, Connie. Listen to this fashion note:

"Skirts this season are little short of revolutionary. Not since the days of the Directory have they applied such searching sculptural indiscretion to the female outline. Young and willowy women favour the new style. Dowagers hope it won't last!"

"Well, according to that, I guess you're all right. By the way, Emily's pretty dressy. You'd better wear your new frock Monday night."

Connie felt nervous the day of the dinner. Uncle David had said she should sit opposite him, as hostess. She was afraid she could think of nothing to say to the guests. Indeed it was hard to rise above the heaviness of her heart. The night before she had dreamed of her mother and of Ian. They had all been together in the little sitting-room back home. With painful clarity of outline, the scene followed her through the day. Even when she was dressed in the blue gown, knowing that it lent her charm, she stood for a moment, her face in her hands, stricken with the futility of the present and the deep, lost meaning of the past. Then, drawing herself up stiffly, she went down the stairs.

It was entirely unconscious on her part, but when the

guests entered the drawing-room at last Connie was standing as though posed before the tall ivory mantelpiece. Emily Harrington stopped short on the threshold.

"Don't move! Please stay that way for another minute while I look at you! Is she real, Judge, or a new Sargent you've bought? Phil, you were a clod when you merely said Miss Richards was *pretty*!"

Then, seeing Connie's distressed embarrassment, she hurried over to her and shook her hand warmly.

"Don't mind my talk. But I honestly meant this. You see, when one's as homely as I am one can enjoy beauty in another woman in a purely æsthetic way."

"Oh," Connie began, "you're——"

"Oh, yes, I am—ugly as a mud fence; but at this age of me I don't care a bit. I really rather like it. It's grand. It leaves me free as air. You see, no matter what I do, there isn't a woman of my acquaintance that's jealous of me or a man that's afraid of me! So I've got friends galore. Isn't that so, Judge? Isn't my face my immunity? Or is there a bigger word for it?"

As she turned towards David, Harrington came up to Connie.

"I'm so glad to see you again," he said. And it was clear from his look that he meant it.

Dinner was easier than Connie had feared. Indeed, she found herself listening with interest and without self-consciousness as the others talked.

The Judge and Harrington swerved into conversation about the Administration. They were both enthusiastic admirers of "Teddy" Roosevelt. The main topics now were the Pure Food Bill, which had been passed in June, and the Wadsworth Meat Inspection Amendment, which had just gone into effect the 1st of July. Emily took an active part in the discussion.

"Well, I'm thankful the bill's gone through. Ever since I read 'The Jungle,' I've wanted to keep a few



strictly hygienic beasts in my own backyard and have them prepared for the table by men in kid gloves! It's a terrible book, isn't it, Judge? But they say Upton Sinclair really knows the facts and doesn't exaggerate. Have you seen it, Miss Richards? It's about the Chicago packing-houses."

"No, I haven't read it."

"Well, don't. You'll enjoy your meals more."

David began to chuckle.

"Have you seen Mr. Dooley on the subject? The way he describes the President's reaction to the book is the best yet. It goes something like this:

"Tiddy was toying with a light breakfast an' idly turnin over th' pages in th' new book with both hands. Suddenly he rose from the table cryin': 'I'm pizenen,' an' begun throwin' sausages out in th' window. Th' ninth wan struck Senator Biveridge on the head an' made him a blonde! Since thin th' President, like th' rest iv us, has become a viggytaryan."

They all laughed, and then the talk drifted on in a fashion new to Connie. Light, clever talk that touched this and that, and nothing long. It fascinated her. Some of the new books mentioned she had read: "The Conquest of Canaan," "The Sea Wolf," and "Beverly of Graustark." But "The Garden of Allah" was new to her. Emily was quite intense about it.

"I couldn't sleep after I read that book. It's so desperately sad, and it's no right to be! Here are two people perfectly suited to each other, madly in love and yet separated for life by a religious scruple! Now, of course, I'm a pagan, but why should religion ever be allowed to bring unhappiness, Judge? Wasn't it invented by man for a kind of solace? It's as though he had said, 'I'll make me a nice comfortable garment to shut out the heat and the cold,' and then it ends by becoming a strait-jacket."



"I don't agree with you, Emily. Religion is never a strait-jacket unless the wearer refuses to see that he's outgrown the original garment and needs a bigger size."

"Oh, but you're forgetting. . . ."

Harrington turned to Connie.

"They're off," he said, smiling. "They've finally arrived at something to argue over! How are you liking Pittsburgh?"

"Very much. I'm still in awe of it, though. After New Salem it seems to me like the capital of the world."

"Well, it's really not such a negligible spot as cities go. Have you been to the parks?"

"Just around Schenley a little."

"You must see Highland. I have an automobile. I know the Judge prefers horses, but would you risk a drive with me some afternoon? I've had very good luck with the thing."

"I've never been in a horseless carriage! It would be thrilling."

"How about Wednesday?"

"Thank you. I'd love it."

"At four, then, shall we say?"

They had coffee in the library, and because the September evening was chilly, David lighted the fire, and the four of them seemed suddenly close to each other. Emily was going to take Connie to a concert the following Friday, and a tea the next week.

"And you must both come to dinner soon. The only way I can keep Phil at home in the evening is to invite guests," she said as they left.

And Harrington looked into Connie's eyes and repeated: "On Wednesday, at four."

That evening marked the beginning of Connie's friendship with the Harringtons. David discussed the matter with her when the next weeks had made it clear that she was to see much of them.

"You couldn't have better friends. I'm very fond of them. And they're both so much older than you that I don't worry in the least when you're out with either of them. Just now, when you wouldn't feel like being gay with a crowd of young people your own age, and yet need diversion, they seem the perfect companions."

And Connie agreed. Emily was a constant delight. Her highly-seasoned remarks, her boundless vitality, and her kind heart all combined to lure Connie out of herself. Phil, too, as she had come to call him, was comfortable to be with. His conversation was ready; he knew how to make conventional pleasures yield their utmost; and his older sophistication was interesting.

They drove often in the parks, sometimes alone and sometimes with Emily. Connie had acquired a motoring veil which wound itself about her wide sailor hat and then, after making a circuit of her throat, ended in a huge bow under her chin. She would reach home breathless with wonder after going twenty miles an hour.

Harrington took her to the Nixon, too, to see Blanche Bates in "The Girl of the Golden West," and Sothorn and Marlow in "The Merchant of Venice."

They had supper on these occasions after the play, in an exclusive little restaurant in the Jenkins Arcade. Connie, wide-eyed, saw men and women in evening clothes drinking cocktails and dancing between the tables.

It was a new world that grew up around her in these weeks. But, while its strangeness served to divert her mind through many hours, her heart still travelled a desolate road. In spite of her devotion to her Uncle David and the close tie that bound them, she was swept with a ghastly homesickness as she stood by her window at night looking over the city. During her sleeping hours she dreamed over and over the same dream. In it she was going along the sidewalk to the back porch of the brick house, after a long absence. They were all

there, Liza Jane, Betsy and her mother, all puzzled and hurt that she should have kept away from them without letting them know where she was. In her dream, she herself was stricken with confusion. Where had she been? Why had she left them?

After these disturbing visions she tossed on her hot pillow till morning.

But another devastation was at work upon her. When the heavy November rains fell and the first sleet of December, Connie walked her bedchamber floor at night, her hands locked in agony. The thought of Jeannie's dear body lying in the dankness of the hillside was torture. Sometimes she went to the door of David's room, feeling that she must give the horror of her thoughts words to some other human being or die herself beneath them. But she always restrained herself. When she tried to pray, however, the usual petitions turned to ashes on her lips.

When the Judge realised that now he was free to bring his friends home to dinner, he availed himself of the opportunity with a boyish eagerness. Every day or two he would call Connie to say, "Ask Morris to set another place to-night, will you? I'm bringing a man with me. You'll enjoy meeting him."

And she always did. Just as she grew daily more aware of the richness of David's own personality, as she saw it against the background of his friendships. The keen insight, the tolerance, the wisdom, and the Antæan touch on things simple and natural. Connie's own mind grew unconsciously as she shared his joys.

There was one small group of men who stood closest to him. The four of them arranged, he told Connie, to meet together frequently for lunch, or sometimes of an evening. They had run up against each other in odd ways and formed an enduring friendship. There was Dr. Shagreen, the best surgeon of that end of the state,

a large man with a prominent nose and chin and a quick, brusque manner. There was Dr. Moore, rector of St. Paul's, a slight man physically, with keen, kind blue eyes and the brow of a student. And Mr. Ward, a chemist, who knew more about steel than any other man in the city. David asked them now to dinner at least once a month. He explained to Connie, before they came the first time, that when they settled to talk in the library after dinner she could sit out of reach of the heavy tobacco smoke and listen if she cared to.

"Only don't be shocked at anything you hear. And slip off to bed when you get bored. As a matter of fact, though, I think you may be interested. You have a first-rate mind when you use it!"

So Connie presided at dinner (where they were all quite openly fond of her) and later poured coffee in the library while the conversation was easy and casual. But after that, when the four lighted their pipes and drew close to the fire, she slipped into the far corner with her crocheting and listened, going quietly to bed before the meeting broke up, often feeling that she had swallowed a large mental meal that lay heavily until such time as she was able to digest it.

One night she slid down very low in her chair, and yet she wanted to hear. They were discussing a play by George Bernard Shaw called "Mrs. Warren's Profession," which had been banned by the police the year before, but was now being played and was coming to Pittsburgh.

"I'm going to see that show," Mr. Ward said. "Why not? I've always thought there was a great possibility for a novel or a play based on the life of a woman of easy virtue who gave her love sacrificially, we might say. Could there conceivably be a moral element in a situation like that, padre?"

Dr. Moore drew at his pipe.

"I'm not sure. It's pretty dangerous ground, to say

the least. But I have often thought this: that between certain women I've come in contact with who are, I might say, abnormally religious, and the type of woman who dispenses her love unconventionally, there is a psychological similarity. The difference between them is largely one of emotional emphasis. Either type with an interchanged background might have been the other, so to speak. What do you say, Judge?"

Then David did an odd thing. He rose abruptly and laid another log on the fire, which did not need it.

"I believe I'm more at home in the field of politics," he said briefly.

While the other men talked on, Connie drew a sharp breath. She was sensitively aware that something in the conversation had struck him. Here was one subject on which he would proffer no opinion. Connie, with her mother's intuitive perception, knew that this matter was linked somehow with his own life. She had stumbled upon a mystery. But she refused to dwell upon it. There were courtesies of the mind as well as of behaviour, and, as to that, nothing could ever make her love him less.

Often after these evenings Connie felt swept away into a different world. She usually took from her bureau drawer a recent letter from Terese or from Huldah and re-read it before she went to bed, to bring herself again to familiar things.

Huldah wrote that she had decided to marry Jack McIlvaine in the spring. They wouldn't have a wedding or any fuss. Just drive into Greensburg and go to some minister's there, as there was none in New Salem she would go to. Connie read between the lines that the church trouble and Jennie's death had left a deep mark on Huldah's heart. Even her wedding plans were tinged with bitterness. But she wrote in lively enough vein about the rest of the community.

There hadn't been much snow, but they'd had one



good sledding party up to the hotel in Delmont. Billy Brown was thinking of going West, and she didn't see why he'd want to let three good farms here go begging and take himself off to Illinois; but Billy was always set in his ways. Jim Wilson and Bella McKain were married, and of course it might be all right; but the report was it was none too soon. Well, it wasn't any of *her* business. Poor Lute Gardner had been found dead in the shack where he kept batch, with his fiddle in his arms. People thought he'd been drinking too much lately, and Mrs. Foster told that the doctor said Lute's heart wasn't any too good. It was a pity, and many a good dance she'd had to his fiddle. Did Connie mind the night he picked her out to play his favourite song to? They were going to fire shots over his grave, some said, since he'd been in the Spanish-American War, or maybe get old Tommy Monroe to play taps on his bugle.

Don Bell was going with a strange girl from Latrobe. He'd had her down to a sleight-of-hand show in Gallo-way's Hall the week before. The show was fine, and the best thing in it was when the magician asked old Mr. Wain, who was so stinkin' good, to come up on the platform, and pulled a deck of cards out of his pocket and said, "Ha, ha—I see you've been playing a little poker on the side!" and the audience yelled, and she wished he'd called a few more she could name up on the stage and given them a red face. Good for them. This was about all, only everybody in town said it was awful seeing the brick house dark at night and to think of the changes in one year, but that was the way things come sometimes. When was Connie coming out, for it seemed so long now since she'd been gone, and what was she going to do after this winter? With love, her friend, Huldah.

After the turn of the year Connie herself thought deeply about what she was to do. Aunt Margaret wrote that she would be home the last of June. While Connie knew



she could stay on after that, yet it would not be the same. She feared she could never be happy there when the mistress of the house took her place. And she knew her Uncle David feared the same.

As to going back alone to New Salem and taking up her teaching of a country school again—the very thought of this sent waves of desperation over her. Uncle David suggested once that she might take a year's work at the University and prepare for teaching in a high school. This seemed the most feasible plan, though Connie knew it, too, was empty enough. All ambition, all interest in the future in so far as she was called upon to create it, was dead within her.

Through this dilemma of the coming years a slow realisation of a possible way out took form in her mind. It came first as a half-formed suspicion and then a strange growing conviction, and it had to do with Phil Harrington. He had dropped all pretence lately of including Emily in their evenings together. He was inviting Connie to the theatre once each week with often a dinner engagement between. And he came out to the house, besides. Connie wondered sometimes if her Uncle David noticed the frequency of his visits.

One night when he had taken her to the Fort Pitt Hotel to dinner, Connie was peculiarly sensible of the warm, luxurious atmosphere about her. Well-bred, richly-dressed people, perfect food, flawless service, and soft, sensuous music from the orchestra! She felt it all like a soothing opiate. Why should she continue to struggle in either her heart or her soul? Why should she not purchase a sedative at any honourable price offered?

She looked up suddenly, half ashamed of the implication of her own thought, and surprised Harrington, whose eyes were fixed on her with a deep telltale light in their depths. He glanced down and began at once to speak casually.

But the moment had been there, and they both knew it. And to Connie it represented a way of escape. Lying wakeful in her bed, she wondered if it would be sheer cowardice on her part to take it. She did not love him, but he was interesting, cultivated, kind—a gentleman. She could perhaps build up a life for herself, be near her Uncle David, and learn in time to crush down the memories that still swept over her with such poignant pain. She wondered.

February came, and March. The sun rose high and bright, even above the drenching smoke from the steel mills, and at dusk the sky was covered with a thin, clear, liquid blue through which the stars turned gold. A note of spring ran through all the hours. David had seen two robins on the lawn; he talked each morning at breakfast about the way he used to watch out for the new lambs when he was a boy; he told again in detail about the way they used to make maple sugar.

But down in the far corner of the lawn an oak tree gauntly rattled its dried leaves in the gusty air. Winter clung to it still, and Connie felt it was so with her heart.

One evening David's three intimates had been unusually entertaining at dinner. Connie had grown very fond of them by this time. They were good men as well as brilliant, each with his own peculiar likeableness. Because of all she had listened to in her quiet corner of the library on these evenings when they foregathered, she realised that she was less the provincial maiden than when she came.

This night as she poured their coffee, after dinner, remembering now that Dr. Shagreen always had a large cup with both cream and sugar, the talk was again on the policies of Theodore Roosevelt and democracy in general. David stood with his back to the fire, smoking a stogie and stirring his coffee.

"But, after all, democracy may not be the last word

in government. It's a good system. Theoretically I consider it the best. Whether it will work indefinitely, remains to be seen. It's a great political experiment. The whole world had to try it. But it may want later on to try another. It's a queer world."

"I hope you don't mean it will some day try socialism, Judge," Mr. Ward said anxiously.

"I don't know, I'm sure. I'm not predicting."

"But why should a thoroughly good system ever be discarded? When man slowly works out a great theory and gets it into practical shape, why in heaven's name can't he hold on to it?" Dr. Shagreen asked irritably.

David smiled. "For the simple reason that man is not a static animal. He's absolutely unpredictable. You get him all nicely adjusted to a stagecoach age, and he takes to trains. You think he's finished at trains, and he makes himself automobiles. And now look what the Wright brothers are doing out in Ohio. We'll all be flying next."

"Oh, now, Judge, you can stop one short of that! They're an interesting pair, those Wrights, and they've got their trick machine off the ground. But it'll be a nine days' wonder, and that's all."

"Maybe," said David cryptically. "But I think we foreshorten our own viewpoint if we consider any state of mind or society or government as final. Growth and change! We can't get away from them."

Connie took out the coffee-tray and then ran up to her room for her work. The conversation bade fair to be engrossing, and she didn't want to miss any.

But even as she came back along the hall, she could tell that the subject had shifted already. She drew back the portieres softly. They did not see her, for they were gathered now at the fireplace, facing each other. Dr. Shagreen was speaking, and at the words Connie stopped short at the threshold.

"All right, padre. What you say about religion in

general I agree with, but there are one or two things in the Creed which I can't believe as *fact*. Emotionally, yes. I can accept them as symbolism, but not as historically true. I'm a doctor."

"I fancy we've all had our difficulties in that line, whether we're doctors or not," David said, smiling.

"And don't exclude the preachers," Dr. Moore put in. "I've probably had a worse time of it with doubts than any of you, for it's my business to be sure of everything."

"Well, what's the answer for men like us, padre?" Mr. Ward asked.

Dr. Moore's thin sensitive face grew grave. There were more lines etched upon it than upon those of the other men. Lines of compassion, as though many sorrows had been unburdened upon his willing heart through the years.

He leaned forward, his eyes on the fire, while the others waited in silence. Then he repeated slowly:

*"And not by eastern windows only,  
When daylight comes, comes in the light;  
In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly,  
But westward, look, the land is bright!"*

"It took me a long time to realise," he added quietly, "that the light doesn't all come in through one window."

Connie turned suddenly, and went back up the stairs to her own room.

She sat there in the darkness, frightened, turning over the little the men had just said and the more they had apparently left unsaid. At last she heard the guests leaving below, heard the Judge fastening the front door and coming up the stairs. He paused for a moment in the hall as though listening, then went into his own room. He moved about, then the crack of light beneath the connecting door went out.

Still Connie sat on thinking, forcing herself to think as she had never done before. "What's the answer for men like us?" The question beat mercilessly upon her mind. "Men like us." She could not ignore the implication. Men like her Uncle David, like Dr. Shagreen and Mr. Ward and Dr. Moore himself. Men like—Ian! For spiritually he was of their breed. She knew it now. This was why he had longed to talk with the Judge on that last Easter visit when his eyes looked anxious. In the company of these men she had already learned to honour Ian would not be an outcast.

"What's the answer for men like us?"

Just before she finally slept she flung up the window and peered out at the clouded, inscrutable face of the sky. There was a wailing March wind such as Jeannie had often told her there had been the night of her birth, a wind which seemed to hold in its moaning the travail of souls. The stars were hidden, and there was no moon.

The next day was a full one. She was going with Emily Harrington to a luncheon at the home of one of her friends, and in the evening with Phil to see David Warfield in "The Music Master." Emily called for her at noon, full of sprightly venom for things in general.

"This Pittsburgh air seems terribly heavy to me sometimes. It isn't the 'smog' I smell, it's the millionaires. I like enough money myself, but I don't like even the food to taste of it—as it probably will to-day! You know, Connie, what I think I'll do this summer? I'm going to England, get me a walking stick and a tweed suit, and knock about by myself!"

Connie drew a sharp breath.

"Yes?" she said. "*England!*"

"Stratford, Oxford, the Lake District, maybe Devonshire, too, later. There's nothing like rural England to set you up when you're surfeited with the industrial age.



Come along! You're the only friend I have, young or old, who can keep quiet eloquently! So I prize you."

"I couldn't, Emily." There was such a note of finality in her voice that Emily turned to look at her and then changed the subject.

The luncheon party was all Emily had predicted. The Weldons were one of Pittsburgh's wealthiest families, and the house upon its rise of ground proclaimed their sure and lofty eminence, by its palatial proportions. It was Connie's first taste of superluxury. She kept close to Emily as they passed up the baronial stairway, were attended by two smart French maids and finally ushered below into an exquisite and intimate drawing-room.

The women, however, were not at all overwhelming. Connie found herself appraising them calmly with her mother's eyes: pleasant, snobbish, interesting, or dull.

The luncheon itself, though supposed to be most informal, was ponderously elegant. The lace cloth worth a king's ransom, the silver crested plates, the candelabra from a Doge's palace, were all incidents against a background of imposing and ostentatious beauty. But why not? The steel mills were running their molten infernos overtime. Ten thousand miners were digging the soft coal from the bowels of the surrounding earth; the smoke of progress hung thick over the great air-brake plants, and the bankers of Pittsburgh were quietly dictating world politics from their private offices.

Miss Weldon was very gracious to Connie as she said good-bye.

"We hope you are going to like Pittsburgh well enough to stay in it, Miss Richards. Tell the Judge we're counting on him to keep you."

When they were on their way home Emily drew a long breath.

"A bit heavyish, wasn't it? Every time I eat there I always want to rush out afterwards and share a bone



with the first dog I meet. Well, they just can't help it. Nice people, you know. I'm fond of them, only they take their money pretty hard. By the way, you're going to see David Warfield to-night, aren't you? Take an extra hanky with you. I wept all over the place when I saw 'The Music Master' last winter in New York!"

When Connie dressed for the evening, her hands trembled. If what she thought was true in regard to Phil Harrington, the time would inevitably come when he would speak. And then her distraught heart would be compelled to make a decision.

When she came downstairs, David looked at her tenderly.

"You're getting to look more like your mother, Connie. Something about the mouth. . . . You're like her, too, in your ways. I see it every day."

And Connie tried to smile back at him as she said simply, "I'm so glad." Then Phil came and they were off.

It was a difficult evening. She had felt from the start that the man beside her was holding himself in check with the greatest difficulty. The play was deeply moving and seemed somehow by the quality of its emotion to be throwing them into each other's arms. Phil leaned near her in the darkness of the theatre; he looked into her eyes when the lights flared on, making no attempt to conceal the meaning in them. A panic seized upon Connie. In spite of all her postulating, she was totally unsure when the reality faced her. Her one impulse now was to make her escape from the crisis she felt to be near.

As soon as the curtain fell on the last act, she turned to Harrington.

"Would you mind taking me home right away? It's a shame to shorten the evening, but I'm so awfully tired."

"Why, of course," Harrington said at once. "I'm sorry. You have had a full day. I'd planned something else, but

we'll do it soon again. There's a little Swiss chalet kind of place I wanted you to see, now it's spring. They've rigged up a little waterfall that gives sort of a romantic effect. . . . We'll go soon." He tried to keep the disappointment out of his voice.

And Connie knew in her heart that he *had* meant to tell her that night.

On the way home, though, nothing happened. They talked of the play and of the luncheon that day, Connie exerting all her power to keep to generalities. She was startled now at the violence of her own determination to ward off Phil's declaration.

He stayed only a short time at the house as they told the Judge about the play, and then said good-night. He held Connie's hand quite openly, however, as he said, "Remember, we're going to the place I told you of *very soon*."

When he had gone David motioned Connie to sit down again.

"I don't want to pry into what, strictly speaking, isn't my business, and yet I feel responsible. It's Harrington, Connie. Do you think he's in love with you?"

As Connie began to demur, embarrassed, the Judge stopped her.

"No, no. I want you to tell me the truth. A woman always knows even before a man has spoken."

"I've been afraid, lately, that he is," Connie confessed, her voice low.

"And how do you feel towards him?"

"I don't know. I've thought about it. . . . Perhaps I might be able to marry him——"

"But you don't love him."

"No."

The Judge paced slowly back and forth before the fire. Connie sank miserably into her chair. At last David spoke.

"Connie, you've never really given me your confidence, and I haven't asked for it. I knew your heart was too sore over your mother's death to consider anything else for a while. Now I think the time has come when your future must be talked over. What do you intend to do about Ian?"

Connie started as though the words had struck her.

"About *Ian*?"

"Yes."

"But what *could* I do? We parted forever."

The Judge did not smile at the young finality of this. His face only looked more grave.

"You sent him away?"

"Yes. I told him under the circumstances I felt it would be best for us not to meet again. I've never heard from him since. I don't even know where he is."

"But you still love him." The Judge's directness was merciless.

Connie's head was bent low.

"Yes," she whispered at last.

"And yet you would consider marrying another man?"

"I—I would have been honest with him," Connie faltered.

David's eyes blazed. "With him! But what about yourself?"

He turned towards the fireplace, his foot on the fender, his arm resting upon the mantel. When he began to speak, he did not turn to face her.

"Connie, it's for your mother's sake I'm doing this as much as for you. She was dearer to me than you will ever know, and you're all that's left to me now of her. I'm saying what I am going to say because I won't see you wreck your life—as I did."

In the silence Connie waited, tense. He went on.

"When I was a boy I fell in love—terribly, madly in love, and the girl felt the same towards me. The difficulty

was her station. She had no background, no education. I was looking forward to what I hoped would be a career. She saw the difficulties even better than I did. Between us, we gave in to them. We parted. But I never got over it. Nor did she. We love each other still, and it's ruined our lives. There's the story. I don't want you to make the same mistake."

Connie could not speak. She could guess what it had cost him to put this into words. The silence between them was not a strained one, however. They understood each other.

And then at last Connie raised her voice. It was like a cry.

"What can I do?"

"You can get in touch with Ian and ask him to come back."

"But what if he—It's almost a year——"

"You mean his feeling for you may have changed?"

"Yes."

David shook his head as he looked at the girl before him.

"I think there's small danger of that, if I'm any judge of character."

"I was so hard at the time. I see it now. It was bitter for us both. And now, I suppose I have my pride——"

"There's no place for pride where love is concerned, Connie. Would you like me to locate him for you?"

"Oh, *would* you?" All the longing of her heart was in the cry.

And then something strange happened to Connie. The long pent-up tears that had not come before swept over her like a flood. All the steely repression of the last months broke beneath the storm of her weeping.

David was wise. He patted her head gently but refrained from argument even when the sobs grew violent. Then he made her a hot drink with his own hands, and supported her while she sipped it.

"Well, well!" he said when at last she was leaning quietly against him. "That's a queer way to show you're happy!"

She smiled up at him tremulously.

"You understand everything, don't you?"

He helped her up the stairs, feeling without her telling him the exhaustion that had overtaken her now. When he returned to the library, he walked restlessly about. At last, muttering, "There's no time like the present," he went to his desk and began a letter.

The next morning Connie did not appear at breakfast. When David went up to see her, he found her lying very white and limp but with the strained look gone from her eyes.

"I'm not really sick," she confessed. "I just feel like a clock that's run down."

He pressed her hand in his own. "You've been brave for a long stretch. You just need to relax now, I think."

"And you'll really try to——"

"I've written already to his uncle, Dr. Warre. I thought that was the best way to go about it. We should hear soon. Now just stay in bed and I'll have the doctor come in and check up on you." In spite of himself the Judge's voice was anxious.

Connie smiled. "All right. But please don't worry about me. I haven't been so peaceful for months. I feel as though I could sleep now for a week on end."

"Poor child!" David said, and kissed her forehead.

When the doctor came, he only confirmed what Connie herself knew.

"Just a little nervous collapse," he told the Judge as he left. "Has she been under tension of any kind?"

"Rather," David answered briefly.

"Well, that's it. Just let her alone. Plenty of sleep and rest and nourishing food. I've left a prescription for a tonic. But no cause for alarm. Young people mend easily."

And Connie slept. A great quiet enveloped her. As though stopped at last by the check of an invisible hand, the struggle of her heart and brain was ended. She rested even from the bitterness of the fortune that had come too late. She slept as in the brick house, with her mother in the room next to hers and Liza Jane and Betsy across the hall, and the old clock downstairs with its slow ringing measure of the hours.

When the letter came, David brought it up at once. He read it while Connie sat erect, the sudden terror of a question in her eyes. The message was brief.

MY DEAR JUDGE McDOWELL:

My nephew Ian Donaldson left last July for a year's study at Oxford. He will be there until the first of June, when he expects to be at the Red Horse in Stratford for two weeks. Beyond this I do not know his plans.

Yours truly,

ARCHIBALD WARRE.

When he had finished, Connie looked steadily at her uncle.

"I'm going to him," she said. "I'll meet him in Stratford."

"My dear, *alone*."

"It doesn't matter. I've got things straightened out in my mind at last."

"But can't you write him and then let him come back here to you?"

Connie shook her head.

"I can't quite explain, but—it's so strange, his being there. It's as though it had been *planned* to happen like this. Don't say no, Uncle David."

And at the look on her face the Judge held his peace.

So it was decided. Connie was to sail from New York the last of May, and by a wonderful streak of luck—from the Judge's point of view particularly—Emily Harrington



would sail with her. They would go together to London, from whence Connie would make her journey to Stratford alone. But David talked long and privately to Emily.

"Keep in touch with her, Emily, till you're sure everything's all right, will you? I'm practically certain it will be a case of lovers meeting; but, after all, he's been gone a year in strange parts, and this is a vain and transitory world. . . . I'll feel relieved when I know everything's ended happily. It's a wonderful comfort, Emily, you're going along."

"Don't act as if I was an afterthought now, Judge! Connie can tell you I proposed this whole idea weeks ago. Though I didn't know then there was a lover at the end of the string——"

She broke off, and her homely face clouded over as David had never seen it before.

"Keep an eye on Phil while I'm away, will you, Judge?" she asked in a low voice. "I'm afraid he's been hit by both barrels this time. I wouldn't leave him just now, but he's really better off at the Club. He always says I know too much about him for his comfort. I can't help it. We're pretty close, you know. Just—have a look at him occasionally, will you?"

They wrung each other's hands hard.

In all her simple preparations, Connie was possessed of the same feeling she had had when the word first came of Ian's whereabouts. It was as though her smallest movements now were being guided and ordered by some one other than herself. So, when she came at last to discuss the expense of the trip with David, she heard the details of the coal money with no sharp pain at her heart.

"I deposited five thousand dollars to your account in the First National here. You can draw on that for your trip or for anything else. The rest I invested as well as I knew how, and the papers are all in a lock box at the same bank in your name. For the fortune is yours, Connie. I don't

need it, and I don't want—I mean, it should pass to you and to your children after you.”

As he ended, he saw the light which Jeannie had so loved suddenly diffuse Connie's face.

“And one thing more,” he added. “Your status is different from what it was when you last saw Ian. If you wish to be married at once, it will be possible even if Ian has no plans. I'm sure you can trust him to find his niche somewhere before long. But why wait? You need him now.”

Harrington had got the news while Connie was still sick. He was very game when he came to see her.

“The ocean trip will put you absolutely on your feet. Best thing in the world. Don't let Emily boss the life out of you the way she does me, though. Well, good-bye, Connie, if I'm not able to get over again. . . . Devilish hard case I'm working on just now. . . . The best of everything for you—always!”

“Phil, I can't tell you what your friendship has been to me this winter!”

“Has it really meant something?”

His voice for a moment was unguarded.

“So much!”

“That's something to keep then, Connie. Good-bye.”

A few days before she was to leave, Connie made a sudden decision. She felt a little guilty in not telling David, but she was afraid he would suggest coming with her, and she had to go alone, back to New Salem, quite unannounced, for a night at least. She left a hasty note and started at noon. She got off the train at Greensburg, and after some delay found a driver to take her out. In all her life she had never been away from the little town so long!

It was five o'clock when they crossed the old covered wooden bridge and started up the hill, past the mill, past the Stone Hotel, past Galloway's, past Mr. Drum standing in the post-office door, past all the quiet familiar street.

She shrank back in the carriage. She did not want to speak to any one just yet.

At the entrance to Gay Street, she paid the driver and got out. There was no one for the moment in sight. She hurried down the intersecting street, stepped off to the narrow path that ran beside the short stony hill and led finally to the larger hill beyond. Connie's heart beat thickly; she was nearing her tryst.

But when she reached the place at last, the young green grass had covered all the clay. She sank down and softly laid her hand upon the mound. "Her tears fell, but they were gentle tears like the spring rains.

She sat in the warm sunshine and looked about. There, along the rim of the horizon stood the stately hills. At either side were the spreading fields of the new wheat. And below, as though held tenderly in a living chalice, lay the little town. From where she sat she could pick out the familiar dwellings, even glimpse the brick house itself between the trees.

There was the faint sound of the blacksmith's anvil, and of children shouting at their play. Near by, along the hedge, a bird sang a long, sweet, sustained note.

And even as her hand caressed the sculchre that held the unspeakably precious dust, Connie knew at last, after all the anguished doubts, that the gay, brave, adventuring spirit of Jeannie was faring on somewhere—was, perhaps, even at that moment, near her child.

She got up at last, loath to leave. There was peace here and beauty, and a quiet that soothed her heart. She looked with aching tenderness on the small neat headstones which David had ordered. Her father's, Liza Jane's, Betsy's, and then again at the dearest.

JEANNIE  
Wife of Rev. James Richards  
1852-1906

Connie turned away and walked slowly down the hill. Life must still go on—her life, and those that would perhaps some day come after her.

She hurried up the street, and into the side gate of the Forsythe house. Terese was standing by the porch, looking over the freshly planted garden. She had not heard Connie's step on the grass. The girl stopped where she was, her eyes quickened by absence, amazed at the beauty of the older woman. "Why," she thought to herself, "no one I've met in Pittsburgh could hold a candle to Terese for looks!"

With the thought came the sudden revelation. Here, she knew in a flash of intuitive wisdom, was the answer to her Uncle David's confession. A hundred trifles through the years rose now in her mind to confirm it. Terese was the woman he loved. The knowledge shook her, even while it strangely now seemed old within her.

Then Terese turned, saw Connie, and with a glad cry ran towards her and swept her into her arms.

They sat on the porch overlooking the garden and the little run under the willow tree where the ducks played—and talked over the long months between. When Connie told hesitantly of her reason for going to England, Terese drew a long breath.

"I'm glad. I always wanted to tell you something, but I never had the courage. I'll say it now. Never give him up, Connie. No matter what comes, never give him up."

They walked down in the early evening to see old Mrs. Woods. It was sweet to sit again in the high-backed rocker in the kitchen and feel their love about her.

"Now, Terese, you had her to supper, and I'll keep her all night. Ain't that fair? Then to-morrow, if you want, you can make dinner and we'll *both* come. How's that for planning?"

So it was arranged. And Connie slept deeply in the big

feather bed in the room over the parlour and woke to hear the robins singing in the apple trees.

In the morning they both went with her into the brick house. It did not have the musty odour of emptiness, however. Terese had faithfully opened it each day, kept it heated and aired.

Connie walked through the rooms without speaking. She went upstairs to a drawer of her mother's bureau where Jeannie had always kept her sewing. She drew out a delicate thing of fine white muslin and lace. It was a nightdress upon which Jeannie had lavished the utmost of her skill. Later when the blow had fallen she had quietly put it back in the drawer. Connie folded it now and wrapped it in the paper in which Jeannie had laid it away. Even the affectionate eyes of the two women below might not see that this alone of all her wedding finery she was taking with her.

Then she looked slowly about her mother's room.

"If you know," she whispered softly at last, "—and I think you do—you'll be glad I'm going."

Before she left that afternoon she put her arms around Terese, their cheeks touching.

"Uncle David will be out soon, I think—to see to the house," she said.

How much older was her heart than a year ago!

## CHAPTER VII

THE VOYAGE WAS UNEVENTFUL. INDEED, AFTER THE sharply etched moment of parting with David, at Union Station in Pittsburgh, Connie had stepped forward as it were into a dream. There was an unreality about it which even Emily's animated wit could not entirely dispel. She lay now for long hours in her deck chair pretending to be asleep, so that she might restore by repetition her sense of the actual. She was on her way to Ian. She was going to meet him in Stratford. She would see the scenes her mother had longed to see. She was using some of the coal money in order to do it. These were facts, however unbelievable they seemed.

Emily had soon attached to herself some interesting companions. She played shuffleboard in the mornings with a coal magnate who knew Phil and the Judge, too. She played bridge whist with three other sprightly women in the afternoons, and danced at night with a lean young author who found her pungent views stimulating.

But, in between, she kept rather tender watch over her charge, who made such small demands upon her and showed no inclination to enter into the ship's activities.

When the talk at last began to centre on what hour they would reach Southampton, a panic of fear seized suddenly upon Connie. Suppose Ian had met some one over here during the year, that he cared for! Suppose—oh, ghastly and insupportable thought—suppose he were already *married*! Even the feeling that Dr. Warre would surely have mentioned such a contingency did not entirely allay the dread. His last sentence, indeed, as she looked back upon it now, was almost ominous. "Beyond this I dc



not know his plans." Then he *had* plans, perhaps, that he had not told his uncle!

A feeling of impotence fell hard upon Connie as she lived through the last hours aboard ship. Time and space were not abstract elements. They were cruel monsters that had perhaps already wrought ruin upon her happiness. She fought them in her mind feebly, and was vanquished.

Emily took her to task.

"Now buck up, child! Stop counting hours and all that sort of thing, and just think that you're about to set foot on a right tidy little island. And if you don't love it from the first bally Britisher you meet, then I'm terribly mistaken."

Connie smiled wanly and tried to show interest in the landing. It was later than they had expected when they finally disembarked and got the boat train for London. On the way up, Emily talked to Connie about her plans.

"You'll have to stay overnight with me now, of course, in London, but you can go right on to Stratford tomorrow if you want—and I suppose you do!"

At Connie's quick assent she explained, "I'm going to give you a letter of introduction to a Miss Dereward whom I know there. I stayed with her twice. She has a perfectly charming old house, but she lost a lot of money; and so now she takes a few paying guests. You'll probably find two or three nice fussy old ladies from London and a Welsh schoolmaster and a barrister from Scotland and his wife. All very quiet and proper, but you'll adore it if she can take you."

She wrote an address firmly on her card with a word of introduction and gave it to Connie.

"Oh, by the way, when you get settled and have met your Ian, give the local telephone station a shock by calling me up, will you? I don't think they ever use long distance over here except in case of battle, murder, or

sudden death! Well—here we are in dear old Lunning!"

The hotel Emily chose was quietly elegant. Something in its dignified comfort gave Connie a new spurt of courage. By the next day, however, as she said good-bye to Emily at the station and climbed into the small railway carriage, she was nervously afraid.

She watched the beauty of the English countryside passing by the window, as she held her cold hands tightly together and prayed as she had not done for many months. Strange, retroactive petitions like the innocent prayers of her childhood.

"Grant that he may not have found some one else to love! Grant that he may not be married! Oh, grant that he may be *there!*"

At the station in Stratford she took a cab to the address Emily had given her. As it turned in at last to the "Riverside," she drew an unconscious breath of delight. The large grey stone house stood in a green lawn which bordered the river itself!

Connie paid the driver and sent him away, not even knowing she should have detained him until she was certain of being received. She stood on the steps with her bags beside her, looking at the scene with a realisation of its beauty so deep that her heart ached with it.

There flowed the quiet Avon, almost at her feet. Between the bordering trees she could glimpse the swans sailing slowly by. There had been rain that morning, and the deep rich grass was still sweet from it. So was the garden of flowers that stretched to the east. Beyond that, separated only by a low stone wall, rose an ancient church with a delicate and lofty spire.

She turned at last to the door to make herself known. When Miss Dereward came she read Emily's card and then smiled at Connie.

"Oh, yes, I remember Miss Harrington. So unusual and so delightful. And I am glad to say I can take you,

Miss Richards. Just by the greatest bit of luck, too. I have been holding my favourite room for an old lady from Newcastle, but only this morning I got word she's not arriving. Won't you come up?"

Connie entered the wide hall, and went up the stairway. Miss Dereward threw open the door.

"I hope you will like it. It faces the garden, and the flowers are rather nice just now. You can watch the river, too, as you lie in bed."

"Is the church——" Connie began timidly.

"Yes. That's *the* church. Shakespeare is buried under the chancel. I've always rather liked living in the shadow of it. You can wander in and look about any time you like. This afternoon at four they have evensong in the choir stalls. Visitors always like to go. Now I'll show you where the bath is and tell you about the meals. . . ."

When Connie was alone she made a quick toilette even though her hands were not steady. For she would make no delay. She would go at once to the Red Horse and see if Ian was there. Miss Dereward had said it was only two streets over.

She came down the stairs and out upon the lawn. The nearest way to the street, she had been told, was through the garden and out by the little gate at the corner. She walked slowly past the wide beds of blooming flowers, listening to the soft sound of the water, moved by the calm loveliness which was like no other she had ever seen.

She opened the small gate and found herself at the edge of the church property. Under the thick canopy of over-lacing elm branches she saw a few people coming up the walk and entering the church. Evensong, Miss Dereward had called the service. A sweet name! She had never heard of it before. And it must now be four o'clock. She suddenly decided to slip into the church for the brief service before she went on to the hotel. Perhaps by so doing her heart would be calmer and more brave.

She passed through the great doorway, stood hesitant in the dimness of the vaulted stone, and then followed the old verger forward to the choir stalls. She was conscious first of the flagging worn by feet through the centuries, and then of the gold and whiteness of the altar which glowed now from a band of sunlight coming through the high western windows.

Connie sat in her place, scarcely breathing. Near her, within the chancel rail, lay the dust of Shakespeare! Above the altar spread the rainbow radiance of the great panelled window, the light and colour centering about the figure of the dying Christ.

On all sides beauty, like a sacrifice, was offered up, in the splendour of the glass and the carving of the ancient stone.

There were new feet upon the floor just then. The old verger was ushering a group of people to the stalls in front of Connie: an elderly man and woman, a young girl, and two young men. Connie gripped the wood of the seat beside her to keep herself from outcry or movement. One of the young men was Ian.

He sat with his face towards the great window, but even so she could see that he was thinner and older-looking by more than a year. And with the nearness to him came such an overwhelming surge of her love that she was shaken with it.

They were kneeling now. She laid her face against the coolness of the wood and tried to control the throbbing of her heart. She must be calm when she spoke to him, and not let him know—— Not until she had found out. She must be sure. . . .

When they rose for the Psalter she could hear his voice! She strained for the tones through the mixed murmur of the others. His dear voice. He must be the same! Love like theirs, no matter what the stress, could not be changed in one short year. "Love is not love which alters when it

alteration finds." The words seemed to breathe from the stone slab in the chancel.

The brief service was soon over. The people knelt for the last time. There was silence. A thousand thousand prayers clung to the altar and the fretted stone. Time, like the Avon, flowed by the church through the long centuries. The sons of men came and passed. The shrine remained.

Over their heads now the voice of the minister came low as though taking up the words let fall by many lips before him:

"Support us all the day long of this troublous life on earth, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes and the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over and our work is done. Then in Thy mercy grant us a safe lodging and peace at the last. . . ."

"And peace at the last," Connie's heart echoed as she rose.

She waited in her place while Ian stood beside the stone slab of Shakespeare's grave, looked long and reverently upon the altar, and then started towards the rear of the church. He had not seen her. She came out of the stalls and followed him. The girl she had noted fearfully during the service was evidently not with him. She had passed on with the older couple. Ian and the other young man talked together as they looked at the effigies in a small crypt and read the inscriptions.

Connie felt she could wait no longer. She went towards them and touched Ian's arm. He turned, saw her, and his face went white.

"Connie!"

And at the tone and the hunger in his eyes Connie knew there was no need of further questioning. She put both her hands in his.

"I came to find you," she said simply.

They discovered a sheltered place at last along the river,



where the great trees hid them from view. Ian spread his topcoat on the ground, and they sat there, lost in a new rapture deeper than they had yet known.

There was so much, so sadly much, to tell. But even with their eyes wet they resolved to take the full trip as Jeannie had planned it, for their wedding journey. Their love's memorial to her! They would be married here in Stratford—sacred now to them forever because of their reunion—as soon as the English law permitted. Meanwhile. . . . Their eyes drank deep. Their lips clung again.

It was June, the month of lovers, and June in one of the fairest spots of England! In the days that followed, Connie and Ian rested from the sorrows behind them and accepted the perfection of their joy. Miss Dereward took them under her especial care. She let them have their lunch alone at a wicker table on the lawn close to the river, where they tossed titbits to the swans, and idled and talked for hours. She gave practical suggestions as to carriages and boats and weather, and told her other guests just what she thought they should know and no more. As to these, there were, as Emily had predicted, two nice old ladies and a bevy of spinsters from London, a bachelor from Glasgow, a middle-aged couple from Birmingham, and an old gentleman with drooping walrus moustaches from somewhere to the south—all old enough to feel no jealousy of the young lovers, and settled enough to be vicariously moved by the romance unexpectedly staged before them. In their best English fashion they unbent a very little; and Connie and Ian, disarming in their radiant happiness, met them more than half-way and were accepted by them.

Connie had called Emily by telephone at once as she had requested, and then written a long letter to her Uncle David. She did not know that Emily had already sent him a cable reading, "All's well upon the Avon."



But, having fulfilled these immediate courtesies, they proceeded to forget the rest of the world. They walked, hand in hand, across the fields to Shottery, wondering as they went through Anne Hathaway's cottage if even Shakespeare himself could have experienced a love like theirs. They sat for blissful afternoons in the garden there, amongst the stocks and the lavender, listening to the bees and feeling the magic circle of the ages open wide to take them in.

They walked to Warwick, resting upon an old stile to eat the lunch Miss Dereward had given them. They drove to Coventry and Leamington and Rugby. They went to Honeybourne and Fenny Compton because Connie loved the sound of the names! Oxford with its dreaming spires now so familiar to Ian they left, along with the more distant places for the real journey, that they might have days in it together.

In the evenings they rented a flat rowboat from the boat place up the river, and rowed and drifted up and down the peaceful Avon until nightfall. It was here they spoke their deepest thoughts. Connie told him little by little of the dark and bitter weight that had lain upon her spirit that winter.

One night Ian spoke suddenly. "There is one thing, Connie, that we have never mentioned—I suppose because it calls up so much pain for us both. But until it is open between us I can't feel perfectly at rest, somehow. I suppose you know what I mean."

"Yes, I know."

"I'm afraid I still see things as I did last year; only, as far as doctrine goes, it seems less important than it did then, from either point of view. Life, and the work there is to be done, looms so much bigger. I still want to be a minister, Connie." He smiled whimsically. "It's the Scots in me, I guess."

"I'm glad," Connie said gently.

"But the question is how much difficulty I'll have in finding a place, even now after the lapse of a year and my extra study. I may still be 'marked,' you know, when I get back. In our own denomination, anyway."

He paused and then went on uncertainly.

"I've grown to love the Church of England service over here. I never realised before what a content of beauty and meaning it has. I've—I've just been wondering lately. . . . My uncle knows the Bishop of Pennsylvania at home: he's quite liberal; through him I might have an opportunity——" He stopped, hesitant.

Connie leaned forward, her hands clasped in her lap, her eyes brooding upon his face.

"Wherever you are or whatever you do, Ian, I shall be beside you."

"Beloved," he whispered. "Beloved!"

The wedding day was set at last for a Wednesday. Though Connie did not know it, every guest at the Riverside, even to the old gentleman with the trailing moustaches, was wishing that the sun would shine upon the bride. For they were all invited to the service, which would be in the church, with the rector and his wife and some acquaintances Ian had made at Oxford and the Red Horse as the only other witnesses. Emily had sent a beautiful pendant to Connie as her gift but had written that she would be unable to get down for the wedding itself, as she was leaving for Scotland. And Connie felt she knew why.

As to their honeymoon journey, Ian had been adamant upon one point. The money for that must be his own.

"We'll have to live on your fortune, I'm afraid, till I get settled somewhere. But for our wedding trip, not a cent of yours, sweet! I'll cable my uncle. We'll work it out some way. I have a little, you know, and I can borrow some, or sell a bond. But this particular money has to be *mine*."

In regard to their other plans one detail had been left

undiscussed. With all their oneness there was between them a tender and beautiful shyness—the same that Jeannie had noted in their relations before.

Ian spoke slowly a few evenings before their wedding day.

"I haven't asked you where you would rather go just after we are married. Would you like to go straight up to London or perhaps just to Warwick to the hotel, since we know it somewhat, and stay there—that night."

Connie did not answer for a moment, and then she said hesitantly:

"I've wondered, Ian. . . . My room here—it faces the garden and the river where we've been so happy. . . . I've grown to love it so! I've wondered if perhaps we could drive to Warwick and have dinner and then come back here quite late—it's moonlight, you know—Miss Dereward would give me a key, and everybody retires so early—we could just slip in, and then leave for London the next day. . . . Would you mind?"

Ian's voice had a strange quality in it.

"Would I *mind*?" he said. "My darling!"

And so it came about that on Wednesday—the weather being as bright and cloudless as though English skies never knew a rain—Connie, dressed in a white dress and a wide white hat, walked slowly through the garden and met Ian waiting for her at the little gate. Then together they entered the old church, where the few guests were already seated in the choir stalls.

As they came to the chancel rail, the light from the west streamed upon the altar and the window above it, as it had on that other afternoon when they had met, and touched their own faces as with a blessing.

The carriage was waiting for them in front of the church. There was much quiet hand-shaking and expression of good wishes for the young Americans, and then they rolled away to the decorous clop-clop of the

horses' hoofs upon the asphalt road. As they left the town, however, and the seclusion of the country road enveloped them, they heard nothing but the beating of each other's hearts.

It was late when they returned—past midnight. As they drove up to the Riverside, the moon was shining on the Avon and upon the grey, quiet walls of the church. Miss Dereward had given them a key, and so they let themselves in quietly and climbed the stairs. Ian's bag had already been sent over that afternoon.

When they reached Connie's room, she opened the door, and they both stepped inside. There was no light within, but from the moon. The perfume of the flowers rose sweet from the garden. Connie moved across to the window and raised the shade higher. The pale light streamed in, touching the high bureau and the chintz chairs; falling upon the bed spread whitely, waiting.

Connie turned. She saw that Ian was still standing inside the door. And suddenly she knew that it would always be so: Ian, waiting, longing, yet hesitant on the threshold—her hands outstretched, as they were now!

EPILOGUE

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD

1910





## EPILOGUE

IT HAD BEEN CONNIE'S WISH AND THEREFORE IN IAN'S EYES not lightly to be put aside. It was her desire to build, somewhere near Pittsburgh, a farmhouse modelled after the old one on the Whitethorn, and put into it the furniture from the brick house in New Salem which she could not bear to sell or part with. It would be a summer home for them always, and David could enjoy it, too.

When the farm was finally located and the house built, the men both approved her wisdom. Into its planning and detail David had entered with boyish zest. The old spring house should be left standing; a young peach orchard set out, some catalpas planted along the driveway, a new fence built around the pasture meadow!

It was all completed, ready for occupancy the third summer after Ian and Connie's marriage. And it was here Connie wanted their child to be born.

Ian was anxious. "Of course we have the auto now, so I can get out from the city quickly, and the doctor has his car, but still. . . . Darling, we can't take chances, you know. Wouldn't you be safer in town?"

"Everything will be all right. I'll have the nurse right here, and you may engage as many doctors as you wish. Look at this room, Ian! It's exactly as my grandmother's was on the farm. Uncle David remembered all the details. It's just like the room where I was born myself, and my mother before me! All the same furniture! I would so love to have our baby——"

"Of course, sweet. You shall. I'll speak with the doctor and be sure everything's right!"

But when the time came, the curse of travail fell heavily upon Connie as it had fallen upon her mother and

her grandmother. There was a long night and a bitter day before the thin new cry gave sign to Ian and David, pacing desperately in the room below, that the struggle had ended in victory. The child, the nurse told them, was a girl.

When Ian went in to kneel beside Connie, his eyes wet as he kissed her, he laid his cheek against hers and whispered, "So it's little Jeannie!"

She smiled, as she clung to his hand. "You knew about the name then—even if I didn't say?"

"It couldn't be anything else, dearest!"

David came out each day, and Ian did not go back to the city that week. He worked on his sermon on the porch below Connie's room, where he could hear her voice and the baby's. He had found his place at last as assistant to Dr. Moore at St. Paul's, to which he had been called at once upon taking orders. He was happier in his work than he had dreamed of being—happy enough now to forget the intervening years of discouragement and waiting. Already there was a stir through the city of the new young preacher, who was filling the church at the four o'clock service. He had something to give, people said.

David had told him lately that Dr. Moore predicted he would go far. Ian had sat thoughtful for a minute.

"I don't know that I care so much about going *far*," he said at last; "but I should like to go *deep* where I do go."

And David had silently held out his hand.

As the days passed now, Connie lay upon the bed in which she herself had been born, the bed that had been Jeannie's in the brick house in New Salem and Sarah's on the farm, and thought of the women who had lain upon it before her. Their eyes had fixed themselves upon these same smooth high posts, the same patchwork quilts, the same tall chest of drawers. They had felt the mystery

as she felt it now. This miracle of the new life that was part and parcel of her own heart. Dear beyond all remembrance of the pain. Her child.

But Sarah was gone and Jeannie. And age, Connie knew, would some day work its will upon her. The ever-rolling stream moved on. What would the coming years bring to her child? 1912—1914—1918—1920—1930—1935. . . .

So the tale of time would be told again in the life of the new Jeannie, and who could predict how far the experiences of these unborn years would carry her into a new and different world!

Connie suddenly called to the nurse in the next room.

"Miss Mason, will you please give me that book on top of the bureau? The brown one."

Miss Mason came at once.

"It must be very old," she said as she gave the volume into Connie's hands.

When she was alone again Connie fingered the brown book. There were on its pages the fingerprints of three generations of women before her. While the changes and chances of mortality had beaten upon them, something within them had remained invulnerable, inviolable. They had gone down to death spiritually undefeated. Would it be so with her? Would it be so with her child?

Had the rock for her been shaken at its foundations? Would the salt of the soul have lost its savour for those who came after her? She lay troubled, wondering.

Then, suddenly she felt them near her! The great-grandmother of pioneer days, her grandmother Sarah, her own mother Jeannie. She felt their spirits encompassing hers like a luminous flame! In the clarifying wisdom which seemed to come from the perspective of their immortality, she knew at last the answer to the question that had torn at her heart for so long. She saw with their eyes what was the immutable essence of religion

in all the ages: the dependence of the human soul upon its God! the cry sent upwards in the night! the grasp of man's spirit upon Infinity!

And the onward sweep of the years could not change this; neither could the honest search for truth do it hurt. For here was the foundation of the universe.

The old brown book fell open of itself.

Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations  
Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou  
hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting  
to everlasting, Thou art God.

. . . . .

Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants, *and Thy glory unto  
their children!*

She lay quiet, smiling with a great peace, as though she had reached the end of a journey.

The warm scent of the roses came up to her. She could hear Ian's voice laughing with her Uncle David in the garden below. There was the music of a scythe being whetted by the gardener, and the rich summer sounds drifting in on the June air.

In the next room, the representative of the new generation stirred, cried a little, and then settled again to sleep.

THE END



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